Sorting out Songs: Reconsidering the Classics of Heian Court Culture

Ivo Smits
Leiden University

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A history of Japanese literature: The Heian period (ca. 800-1200)

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Preliminary remarks

This text grew out of my contribution to a draft chapter for a history of Japanese literature that eventually took a completely different format, rendering a narrative approach such as this one redundant. The original idea was a narrative aimed at an audience of students and general readers outlining an alternative history of the literature of the Heian period (ca. 800-1200). I offer it here as a tool in teaching about and reflecting on literature of the classical period.

The original set-up was that a second author would contribute a section on tale literature (*monogatari*); that section is not included here.

The explicit agenda of this chapter is twofold: to decentre narrative fiction as the core "literature" of the Heian period —a view, in fact, that I think largely holds true for the entire trajectory of premodern Japanese literature—, and to emphatically include texts written in Sino-Japanese (*kanbun*) — a choice that also seems obvious to me and that implies a certain decentring of literature in the "national language." The first aspiration is bound to be not entirely successful in a classroom environment: it is in practice difficult not to organize teaching around the nineteenth- and twentieth-century canons of premodern literature that invariably privilege narration. A similar logistical issue also presents itself when attempting to convert the second starting point in into a teaching syllabus: after all, there still are not all that many Sino-Japanese texts available in translation. That said, the situation is getting better and such alternative literary histories can be taught.

Obviously, given this explicit agenda, it equally means that this chapter is an interpretation, not a claim to a definitive understanding.

Equally obviously, there are shortcomings to this chapter. To name just one, there is a near absence of discussions of concrete text passages from primary sources. This is a treat quite common to literary histories, to be sure, yet this chapter does operate at a rather 'meta level'; it runs the risk of being abstract. My main excuse is that in an attempt to 'focus' I ended up with a text of some 28,000 words; to enrich it with analyses of source texts would turn the chapter into something even more unwieldy than it already was.

The chapter's title is intended to point towards one pattern that is fairly consistent throughout the Heian period: that poetry in its many manifestations structured the literary landscape and that poems were being "sorted out" and re-rubricized continuously to refashion or reinvent that literary landscape.

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Dr. Ivo Smits
Professor of Arts and Cultures of Japan
Leiden University Institute for Area Studies (LIAS)
Leiden University - P.O. Box 9515 - 2300 RA Leiden
The Netherlands
E-mail: i.b.smits@hum.leidenuniv.nl
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Sorting out songs:

Reconsidering the classics of Heian court culture

Ivo Smits

[1.] Canonisation and reorientation

Court society in Heian Japan was, in the clichéd parlance of centuries, a world "above the clouds" and it is no doubt this appeal of narrative Japanese texts that so eloquently conjure up the ruminations, glories and anxieties of idle courtiers in pursuit of beauty that explains the domination of Heian literature's reputation as expressive of a highly aesthetic, refined, emotional and introspective, as well as morally of lax, culture. While not utterly wrong, it is this reputation of the Heian classics that obfuscates the rich variety of textual production in this period.

This chapter has two important aims for a history of Japanese literature of the classical age: to redefine "Japanese literature" for the Heian period (794-1185) as not exclusively vernacular but as at least bilingual (Japanese or *wabun*, and Chinese or Sino-Japanese, known as *kanbun*), and to emphasize the central role of poetry in the shaping and functioning of texts of this period. These two aims imply a revision of more traditional representations of Heian literature and translate into a reticence with regards to tale literature (*monogatari*) and a privileging of poetry in general and texts in Sino-Japanese in particular. This chapter does not systematically concentrate on single authors, but, if anything, takes its cue from texts and their interplay with political and cultural powerbrokers.

Canonisations

The modern canon of Heian literature took shape at the end of the nineteenth century and its first proclamation can be traced back to the publication of the earliest modern literary

histories such as *A national literature reader* (*Kokubungaku tokuhon*, 1890) by the Tokyo Imperial University professor Haga Yaichi (1867-1927) and others or the voluminous *A history of Japanese literature* (*Nihon bungakushi*, 1890) by Mikami Sanji (1865-1939) and Takatsu Kuwasaburō (1864-1921). These publications marked a modern conception of both constituent terms of the notion 'Japanese literature'. The idea of 'literature' was to be defined along newly imported western notions of *belles lettres*; to this end, the new word *bungaku* was invented. In fact an old term from classical Chinese historiography denoting the study of arts, *bungaku* now came to indicate texts that somehow convey the inner or outer worlds through imagination; in other words, such genres as the epic, the lyric and the dramatic. The element 'Japanese' was explained as: in the Japanese language, the new "national language" (*kokugo*) that would help to give coherence to the Japanese nation as it was given shape by the government of the Meiji period (1868-1912). Japanese literature, then, was to be regarded as a "national literature" (*kokubungaku*) and its new histories not only showed that Japan had a long and impressive pedigree of truly literary genres but quickly also suggested that the works enlisted in the modern canon displayed laudable traits of Japan's national character.

When around 1890 these first modern canons of a national literature were created, it was poetry and prose in Japanese from the Heian period (794-1185) that formed the first comprehensive body of texts that fitted the label 'Japanese literature.' That a large number of texts in the national language that were seen to lay an important foundation for a national literature were created in precisely this period designated in retrospect the court culture that produced them an important beginning of national culture.

The recognition that this same court culture seemed to be intent on somehow defining a form of 'Japaneseness,' in that it conceived of distinct categories of a 'Japan' and a 'China,' only reinforced this designation. Whole sets of associated categories that ultimately led back to "Japan or China" seemed to exist at the Heian court: Chinese characters as "male writing" (*otoko moji*) for public texts and Chinese style painting (*kara-e*) for public spaces, functioned as the opposite of the Japanese syllable script (*kana*, and more specifically its cursive form, *hiragana*) as "the female hand" (*onnade*) for more

personal, and therefore "literary", texts that were illustrated with Japanese (*yamato-e*) or even "women's drawings" (*onna-e*), and so on.

The late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century canon was to have immense impact. It not only determined the choice of texts that should be regarded as prime literary works, but, perhaps more importantly, it also ingrained the idea that Japanese, be it classical, early modern or modern Japanese, was the only language in which literature could manifest itself. This marginalisation of a huge corpus of Sino-Japanese texts was further institutionalised by the simultaneous establishment, in the late nineteenth century, of universities that distinguished between Chinese studies (*kangaku*) as an academic field devoted to texts from China and "national literature studies" as a field dealing with texts in Japanese.

In this now traditional grand narrative of Japanese literary history, the Heian period is presented as the age in which poetry in Japanese (*uta* or *waka*) finally gained status as one of the highest literary arts through the first royally commissioned *waka* anthology, the *Collection of poems ancient and modern* (*Kokin wakashū* aka *Kokinshū*, commissioned in 905 and completed ca. 914). It is also seen as a period in which narrative fiction and memoir literature came of age with such masterpieces as the *The tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*, ca. 1008) and *The pillow book* (*Makura no sōshi*, 990s). In short, the Heian period was an age in which poetry and prose in the vernacular overcame the dominance of writing in Sino-Japanese; the literary models from China became now either a steppingstone for native genres or objects of resistance. Indeed, many key literary works in Japanese as well as the development of literary forms in the vernacular that have come to be seen as "classical", both within Japan and world-wide (the *monogatari*, or tale literature, and the *waka*), were the products of Heian court society. This in itself colours our perception of this period's literature, for while the court culture was the foremost producer of the extant texts, the equation of court society and literary canon is another element that tends to narrow our view of what literature could encompass in this age. Also, in this narrative the essence of Heian literature, which encompasses four centuries of writing, is reduced to particular vernacular texts of and genres formulated within court circles in the crucial hundred-year span from about 900 to 1000. Early in the tenth century, after a period during which Sino-

Japanese poetry and prose had enjoyed royal favour, the *Collection of poems ancient and modern* codified the practice and formal development of poetry in Japanese. It became the template for a series of in total twenty-one such official anthologies up through the fourteenth century, all compiled in basically the same format. Together with vernacular prose works such as *Tales of Ise* (*Ise monogatari*, tenth century) and *The tale of Genji*, this anthology also became an intertextual touchstone for many other works in various genres as well.

However, despite the prominence of these rightly famous works, the prose works among them counted for little on the surface of the court culture of Heian Japan. Contemporary sources contradict the late nineteenth-century canon; they reveal that the genre hierarchy ranked Buddhist and Confucian texts (in Chinese) and Chinese histories and poetry collections at the top, followed by poetry in Japanese (*waka*), with at the bottom narrative texts in the vernacular. While *The tale of Genji* was canonised within two centuries after it was written and became a cultural icon, by contrast the extensive library of Fujiwara no Michinori (1106-1159), a statesman, scholar and poet of Sino-Japanese verse (*kanshi*), contained not one book in the Japanese vernacular script.

Scripts

Insofar as the written word is concerned, Heian Japan was, at the very least, a biscriptual, and by implication to some extent bilingual, culture. However, the juxtaposition of texts in Japanese, or *kana* script, and Sino-Japanese, or *kanbun*, texts is also misleading, as it suggests a mutual incompatibility of the two categories. It is rather the case that these binary oppositions could merge into a synthesis. Often the term *wakan* is used to denote the variety of encounters between 'Japanese' (*wa*) and 'Chinese' (*kan*) cultural entities. Used since at least the eleventh century, *wakan* initially indicated an enumeration ("Japan and China"), but the term has become a critical axis point to analyse Heian's court culture, working from assumptions of opposition versus interaction between the *wa* and the *kan*. Texts indeed took shape in an environment that mixed languages, scripts, sources, and models.

The first script available to writers in Japan was the Chinese ideograph, whereby graphs conveyed meaning (*mana*, litt. "true names", or *kanji*). Not only were these graphs used to write Sino-Japanese texts (*kanbun*), but different notations were developed to render texts in Japanese, classified under the term *man'yōgana* ("*kana* as used in the eighth-century *Man'yōshū*") whereby the graphs were used mostly to represent sounds (*kana*, "temporary names") rather than meaning. This is also known as *magana*, "true (*i.e.* unaltered in form) *kana*", that is, graphs representing sound (*kana*) but in form looking like the ideograph (*mana*) from which they descended. The next important development in writing was the development, in the ninth century, of two sets of syllable script that both evolved from of *man'yōgana*. The first, known as *katakana*, was well developed as early as 828 and was mostly widely used in monastic and literati (*bunshi*) circles largely for glosses and interpolations in Chinese texts, but by the twelfth century male writers would also compose autonomous texts in *katakana*. The second syllable script, which later, since the seventeenth century, became referred to as *hiragana* ("smoothed out [i.e. cursive form] *kana*"), developed into its full form throughout the second half of the ninth century. The *hiragana* graphs are extremely cursive forms of Chinese characters used to represent sounds. Each syllable could be represented by different *kana*, just as in the seventh and eight centuries multiple Chinese characters had been used to represent the same syllable. *Hiragana* texts, with the *Collection of poems ancient and modern* as the first major example, came close to suppressing ideographs altogether and it is this form that would symbolise Heian literature: texts in the vernacular (Japanese) that visually and linguistically shunned references to a 'China'. Nevertheless, the reality of the Heian textual domain is more complicated. Writers could and would within one and the same text shift between scripts systems (ideographs and *kana*) and the languages they represented (Chinese or Sino-Japanese, and Japanese). In other words, texts in the vernacular, written in the *kana* script, present only one end of a spectrum.

Gendered identities of writing and space

By the late tenth century writing systems seem to have taken on a gendered identity. There was the explicit notion that *hiragana* was a "woman's script" or "woman's hand" (*onnade*).

The extent to which the term *onnade* denoted a calligraphic style rather than a choice of writing system per se remains open to debate, but in practice *hiragana* and a "feminine" calligraphic representation of graphs conflated into the perception that writing in the vernacular, especially where prose was concerned, was largely somehow "feminine". This identification of *hiragana* as feminine gave birth to the later idea that Heian Japan knew a strict division between a masculine world of orthodoxy and technology oriented towards Chinese tradition on the one hand and a feminine world of creativity and artistic fiction in Japanese on the other hand. Such a distinction had a wider impact, because the feminine domain was associated with 'Japan' and the masculine domain with 'China'; 'China' stood for affairs of state, public functions, Japan's appropriation of classical Chinese traditions of learning, rationality, and so on, while 'Japan' stood for the personal sphere (to avoid the anachronistic notion of "privacy"), emotionality and intuition, lyricism, artistic creativity, etc. It must be stressed that the explicit formulation of these gender identifications dates from a much later period, beginning with the "national learning" (*kokugaku*) movement of the eighteenth century that used the Heian court as a locus of cultural identity. In other words, much is still poorly understood about the undeniably gendered conceptions of scripts and the texts that these scripts gave shape to.

Toward the end of the tenth century, the Heian court not only gendered scripts but also physical and social spaces. One well-known example could be seen in the wall paintings of the central part of the palace complex (the Shishinden). Japanese art historians of the Heian period distinguish between "Chinese painting"(*kara-e*) and "Japanese paintings" (*yamato-e*). Rather than a difference in style, this distinction indicated a differentiation in topics: "Chinese paintings" were associated with Chinese subject-matter, be they the Chinese sages in a bamboo grove or the royal quarters' unsettling "rough seas" sliding doors with their foreign "long-armed, long-legged creatures", and "Japanese paintings" were concerned with scenes set in Japan. For example, spaces within the royal palace compound used for official, public and therefore ritualised affairs were, as a rule, decorated with "Chinese paintings", while the personal living quarters of the emperor (the Seiryōden) were usually also enlivened with "Japanese paintings". Even there one could see a further distinction: the living quarters of the emperor (*tennō*) knew

"Chinese paintings", while the wall paintings at the other side of the same partition, where the emperor's ladies-in-waiting were housed, were "Japanese". Japanese paintings could be subdivided into "women's paintings" (*onna-e*) and "men's paintings" (*otoko-e*), a difference that seemed again to have at least as much to do with choice of topic as it had with style, whereby a connection is suggested between "women's painting" and narrative fiction.

In short, notions of "Chinese" and "Japanese" at court largely equated with notions of gender, which in turn coincided with functionality rather than biological sex. The terms "man" (*otoko*) and "woman" (*onna*) had therefore better be understood as "masculine" and "feminine"; however, men had the option to operate in both 'masculine' and 'feminine' modes, according to the demands of the situation, while women ware largely excluded from this possibility. It should be remembered that this gendering of scripts, spaces and images, and the important role of women in creating or expanding new genres in the vernacular, dates only from about the late tenth century onwards.

This gendering is tied to the emergence, in the tenth century, of a new aristocratic ideal, which has been aptly described as being antiprofessional, antimeritocratic, and, to some extent, anti-intellectual. The rise of the Regents' House (*sekkanke*) of the Fujiwara lineage or "clan" (*uji*) was made possible largely by a system that brokered power through marriages and therefore the political centre shifted towards the supposedly private or "rear" quarters of the palace complex (*kōkyū*), where the prevailing script was *kana* and the cultural emphasis rested with writings in vernacular Japanese. These *kana* writings indeed privileged a stress on introspective writings as recordings of the inner state of authors and protagonists, be it in poetry or prose or an inextricable mixture of the two. The important role of women writers in the development of narrative fiction and ego documents in Japanese, which is unparalleled in other traditional literary cultures, is undoubtedly tied to the opportunities created by this cultural-political situation at court.

Later interpretations of this gendering of script gave rise to the mistaken idea of a "taboo" on Chinese writing by women of the period. There are in fact several indications to the contrary, although it is certainly true that any formalised training in Chinese was a male prerogative. A closer look at the family background of several women whom we associate with the development of narrative fiction in *kana* and the creation of court oriented

literature reveals that they belonged to families of literati who often served in the provinces as provincial governors (*zuryō*). Akazome Emon (960?-1045?), Sei Shōnagon (966?-after 1017), Murasaki Shikibu (973?-1014?) and the daughter of Sugawara no Takasue (Sugawara no Takasue no Musume, 1008-?) are examples of women associated with a family tradition of Chinese learning, and as such had to varying degrees a command of writing in Chinese.

Chinese points of reference

Heian Japan was part of East Asia, and one area where this is noticeable is the pervasive presence of certain key texts from the Chinese literary tradition that played a continuous role in Heian texts as a point of reference. It would go too far here to even suggest a survey, but two classics may be singled out: *Selections of refined literature* (Ch. *Wenxuan*, Jp. *Monzen*, early sixth century) and the *Collected works of Bai Juyi* (Ch. *Baishi wenji*, Jp. *Hakushi monjū* [var. *Hakushi bunsū*], 839). How representative these two texts are may be gleaned from a section in *The pillow book* (990s; see below), where lady-in-waiting Sei Shōnagon writes: "[essential] texts in Chinese are: *Collected works of Bai Juyi*, *Selections of refined literature*, … religious dedications, petitions to the throne, formal requests drawn up by learned professors." Both appear in the oldest extant record of the royal library holdings of continental books, the *Catalogue of books existing in Japan* (*Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku*, compiled shortly after 891).

Selections of refined literature, compiled under the patronage of prince Xiao Tong (501-531), heir apparent to the Liang dynasty, is arranged generically and it is likely this feature that helped to make it the canonical work it quickly became throughout East Asia and a standard textbook at the Heian court academy (*daigakuryō*). It is both an immense repository spanning nearly a millennium of 130 authors and 761 pieces, both poetry and prose, and classification scheme, presenting thirty-seven genre categories. Because of its structure, the anthology enforced genre concepts in Chinese literary thinking and was to become staple reading for anyone with a training in the Chinese classics, that is, anyone with a view to function in state bureaucracy. In Japan, too, *Selections of refined literature* was studied vigorously as well as the numerous commentaries to this anthology that

spawned soon after its compilation. The genre schematisation that *Selections of refined literature* promoted became so normative that many Heian reference works and compilations largely took their cue from this Chinese anthology. It presented its readers with a vast array of the rhapsody (also translated as "prose poem", *fu*), the lyrical poem (*shi*), edict (Ch. *zhao* ; Jp. *shō*), the examination question (Ch. *cewen*; Jp. *sakubun*), letter (Ch. *shu*; Jp. *sho*), and Heian *kanbun* anthologies often took it, in whole or in part, as a model, as for example was the case with *Collection of beauties among the literary flowers* (*Bunka shūreishū*, 818). Also, with thirty volumes it was comprehensive enough to suggest that it represented the whole tradition of what later would be called Six Dynasties literature; that Xiao Tong had crafted a "selection" seems to have escaped most Heian readers.

Selections of refined literature was so iconic a text that it lent its name to a specific method of reading texts in Chinese as developed in court academic circles. In an age in which silent reading was as a rule not practiced (and in East Asia commented upon as an oddity), texts in Chinese or Sino-Japanese (*kanbun*) were pronounced (or 'performed') in their "explanatory reading" (*kundoku*), a method of reading that effectively translated a *kanbun* text into a Japanese text by rearranging it according to Japanese grammar. Incidentally, this practice continues to this day. In addition, within an academic context and with focus on smaller units of a Chinese text, Heian Japanese had worked out a way to read phrases twice: once in an approximation of the original Chinese grammar, by chanting the Sino-Japanese readings (*on-yomi*) of the characters, and again in their Japanese equivalent (*kun-yomi*). This method became known as the "*Wenxuan* reading" (*monzen-yomi*), even if this type of *kundoku* was also applied to Buddhist texts.

If the anthology *Selections of refined literature* was illustrious, then the works of the Chinese poet Bai (var. Bo) Juyi (772-846) were truly popular. There is no international literary success story in classical East Asia that compares with the way Bai Juyi swept his Japanese readers of their feet. In 838, the local governor of Dazaifu, Japan's main port for the trade contacts with the Asian continent, discovered in a shipment from China a book containing poems and prose texts by Bai Juyi. He sent the book on to the emperor and for this show of literary connoisseurship he was duly rewarded with a promotion in rank. Bai Juyi had arrived in Japan and he was there to stay. This discovery resulted in a poetic

frenzy among the Japanese literati. The demand for a complete set of Bai's works grew rapidly. The monk Egaku (active 835-864), who maintained a virtual one-man shuttle service with four visits to the Asian continent, played an important role as supplier. When he went to China for the second time, he spent two months in 844 copying Bai's collected works at the Nanchan Temple in Suzhou. Five years earlier Bai himself had deposited this version of his works in the sutra storage of that same temple; at the time this was one of only three copies of Bai's complete works available in China. It was this authorised version that Egaku copied and brought back to Japan. At the very same time, another Japanese monk, Ennin (794-864), then residing in Chang'an, the capital of Tang period China (618-906), also purchased a "Collection of Bai's poetry, six volumes". After the formal decision of the Japanese, in 894, to abandon their official embassies to China, the Chinese court made it a habit to question Japanese monks travelling through their empire, in order to keep up with the latest events in Japan. When these monks were received in audience by the Chinese emperor, a standard point of protocol was the question which Chinese books were known in Japan. The monks never failed to mention Bai Juyi. Bai was himself aware of his success abroad; in a postscript to a copy of his collected works he mentioned that copies of his collected works were available in Korea and Japan. At home, we know from references, Japanese literati used Bai's portrait to decorate the house.

Women, too, enjoyed reading and reciting Bai's poetry. Sei Shōnagon in her *Pillow book* has the occasional, casually dropped reference to his lines. Well known in this respect is a passage in which her empress Teishi (var. Sadako, 977-1000) refers to "the snow on Xianglu Peak", to which Sei responds by having the blinds drawn up, revealing the snow in the garden and by this gesture shows her familiarity with Bai's couplet "I lift the blind to gaze out / at the snow on Xianglu Peak." While one might argue that such references to well-known lines by Bai Juyi are not necessarily a proof of women actually reading his poetry, it certainly seems the case that their familiarity with his work was deemed an asset. Empress Shōshi (var. Akiko, 988-1074), for example, is known to have actively studied his poetry under tutelage of her lady-in-waiting Murasaki Shikibu. Here it may be noted that the empress' study sessions were not "secret", as some translations suggest, but rather "informal".

The degree to which Bai's poetry outshone his contemporary Tang poets in the Heian constellation of the poetic universe is something quite remarkable and cannot be seen as merely a reflection of the contemporary Chinese canon. Nevertheless, the most likely reason for this Japanese success of Bai Juyi was his huge popularity in China. Heian monks travelling through that country could not fail to see that every Chinese seemed to be reading Bai Juyi. The simplicity of Bai's language and the ease with which his poems could be read undoubtedly accounted for this phenomenal success as well.

Heian readers liked Bai Juyi, but they did not necessarily pick up on all dimensions of his work. One intriguing example of this is the Heian love for Bai's *xinyuefu* (Jp. *shingafu*) or "new ballads". The "new ballads" promoted by Bai Juyi were a genre that consisted of rather long poems in a relatively free form, criticizing in a simple tone social and political wrongs. Bai classed the new ballads with his "poems of admonition and instruction" (Ch. *fengyushi*, Jp. *fūyushi*) and considered their effectiveness towards a moral programme to be one of his most important contributions to poetry. The Heian fondness of Bai's often explicitly political ballads is somewhat odd, given that whatever the Japanese nobility liked about Chinese culture, its political ideas were diametrically opposed to the ballads' implications. Heian courtiers showed little compassion with the lowest classes of society, nor did they see why administration should be a matter of proven competence rather than birth, as was the professed case in China, let alone that a government official's duty would be to direct the monarch's eye to undesirable situations in the realm. In fact, it is clear that the Heian courtiers did not care much for the message of Bai's poems, but used the descriptive passages and imitated those in their own poetry. Yet popular the ballads certainly were. When Murasaki Shikibu studied with her empress, it was Bai's ballads that functioned as reading material. When excerpts of Bai Juyi's poetry were singled out for copying, as a present for instance, it was practically always the "new ballads" that were chosen. The Japanese even organized study sessions to discuss these poems. In fact, when Heian nobles mentioned "ballads" they invariably meant Bai Juyi's new ballads. As noted, Heian readers of Chinese poetry preferred easy texts. The simple language of the new ballads will therefore have had a lot to do with their popularity in Heian Japan. Bai himself

emphasized in the preface to the new ballads that the clarity of their meaning is far more important than their literary style.

Periodisation as history

The four centuries of the Heian period were not a monolithic stage in Japan's political, cultural or literary life and it is therefore customary and actually useful to distinguish smaller units. In terms of cultural history, one may use a periodisation into three stages: (1) the early Heian period or the ninth century (794-905), the gestation period that helped to blot out the literature from the eighth century; (2) the middle Heian period or the tenth and first half of eleventh centuries (905 - ca. 1068), the high century of Heian literature plus its direct aftermath and characterised by the dominance of Fujiwara court culture; and, finally, (3) the late Heian period or the second half of eleventh and twelfth centuries (ca. 1068-1185), roughly from the point when the royal family began to resist Fujiwara dominance to the moment when the political centre gravitated towards the powerbase of the Minamoto warrior clan in eastern Japan. The court's centrality in cultural and literary life seemed to naturally continue until the Jōkyū war of 1221, when power shifted unquestionably to the warrior regime in Kamakura.

The characterisation of the first period as a conscious break with Nara court literature may warrant a further comment here: in many ways the move of the capital, effected in 794, from Heijō-kyō (Nara) to Heian-kyō (Kyoto) turned out to be a rather strong break with the past. While not necessarily a conscious program, Heian literary and cultural life appears to have been bent on reinventing itself through a process in which the ninth century functioned as an important episode. Surprisingly few works from the ninth century survive, although two new script forms, *hiragana* and *katakana*, emerged. After the ninth century, the Japanese court no longer sent embassies to China and it stopped compiling official histories. In poetry, the main form of literary expression, one sees in this century the emergence of poetic traditions that do not acknowledge the immediate past in Sino-Japanese verse of the Nara period and that reshaped the form and function of poetry in Japanese (*waka*). *Waka* poets created a new body of poems that would be officially sanctified with the compilation of *Collection of poems ancient and modern*. Its preface

selected only early Heian poets for inclusion in its Hall of fame, the so-called six poetic immortals (*rokkasen*). While *Man'yōshū* poetry in general was a point of reference, the only individual poets of the early eighth century identified as important are Kakinomoto no Hitomaro (?-710?) and Yamabe no Akahito (?-736?). At the same time it is striking to see that Japan's very first anthology of Chinese poetry, *Fond recollections* (*Kaifūsō*, 751), was as good as ignored throughout the Heian and Kamakura periods. The near denial of this anthology in later centuries is perhaps symbolic of the clear break that Heian culture and society seems to have made from the previous era and the association of the beginning of composition in Japan of poetry in Sino-Japanese (*kanshi*) with the court of emperor Saga (786-842, r. 806-809).

[2.] Early poetry and other writings in Sino-Japanese

The eminence of *Selections of refined literature* and *Collected works of Bai Juyi* points to an overriding importance of poetry in Heian literature, and in fact in the whole of the East Asian literary traditions. While Japanese had composed poetry in Japanese from the very beginning of text production, they also quite soon composed poems in Sino-Japanese. A chronology of Heian literature would have to begin with the production, in quick succession, of three royal anthologies of *kanshi* composed by courtiers of the newly established capital. These are *Cloud topping collection* (*Ryōunshū*, 814), *Collection of beauties among the literary flowers* (*Bunka shūreishū*, 818), and *Collection for governing the state* (*Keikokushū*, 827), compiled under the reigns of emperors Saga, for the first two, and Junna (786-840), for the last. The collections very much reflect the court context from which the over 1,200 poems originally included stem. Banquet poetry is an important genre, for example. The anthologies also show a great indebtedness to the poetry of China of the sixth through eighth centuries. Especially the second and third anthologies draw heavily on the structure of the *Selections of refined literature*. That *Collection of beauties among the literary flowers* followed only four years after the first royal *kanshi* collection goes to show that indeed Sino-Japanese poetry was an established literary genre and although only a fraction of the immensely voluminous original of *Collection for governing the state* survives, we know that prose works also came to be included. As a point of

interest, six female *kanshi* poets may be identified in these royal anthologies; they are the only ones for the whole Heian period, but may illustrate that the Heian equation of the feminine with *kana* writing was largely a post-1000 affair.

Curiously, the three imperial *kanshi* anthologies of the early ninth century, although quickly recognized as important milestones in literary history, also seemed to have had very little actual impact on later generations, even later in the Heian period, as we shall see. Saga's and Junna's negation of *Kaifūsō* was ironically echoed by eleventh-century *kanshi* histories. This seems symptomatic of the history of *kanshi* in general: where it is relatively easy to write a history of *waka* that suggests a strong continuity and historical awareness, a Japanese history of *kanshi* writing seems to be one of fits and restarts.

From the beginning of the ninth century, authors of Sino-Japanese poetry and prose (*kanbun*) made attempts to preserve their writings for posterity by compiling private "house" collections (*kashū* or *ie no shū*). While several of these are lost and only remain in historical records as phantom titles, this was a new pattern. The first extant example is *Collection of heavenly anomalies* (*Shōryōshū*, var. *Seireishū*, ca. 835-860), a collection of poems, prayer documents, ritual guides, memorials to the throne, and others, written by Kūkai (aka Kōbō Daishi, 774-835), the founder of the Shingon school of esoteric Buddhism. Kūkai may go on record as the author of the Heian period's oldest literary text, *Indications of the goals of the three teachings* (*Sangō shiiki*, 797); as much as a religious tract this is a stylized presentation of the merits of Buddhism, Daoism and Confucianism. Moreover, he also compiled *A literary mirror and its secret store* (*Bunkyō hifuron*, 819), a massive and detailed manual for the composition of poetry and prose in Sino-Japanese that he based on manuals he collected during his sojourn in China, 804-806; this work still remains an invaluable source for the knowledge of poetic discourse in Tang China as well as early Heian Japan.

Outside monastic circles, too, ninth-century literati would come to collect their writings, yielding among others the posthumously edited *Collected works of Miyako no Yoshika [834-879]* (*Toshi bunshū*, after 879) or the collection of Shimada no Tadaomi (828-892?; *Denshi kashū*, undated) and culminating in Sugawara no Michizane's (845-903) *Literary drafts of the Sugawara house* (*Kanke bunsō*, 900) and *Sugawara family later*

collection (*Kanke kōshū*, 903), and *Collection of the Ki house* (*Kike shū*, after 911?) by Michizane's close friend Ki no Haseo (845-912). Containing 159 prose pieces and 468 chronologically arranged poems, *Literary drafts of the Sugawara house* is the most complete collection of works by a single Heian *kanbun* author.

Michizane offered his family's collections to the throne in 900 and this gesture as well as the royal acceptance of these writings indicates not only the aesthetic value placed on *kanbun* writing but also the symbolic relationship that royal involvement with poetry projects in Sino-Japanese sought to express. During the ninth century, literati scholar-poets, or *bunshi*, were cultural heroes who potentially embodied forces that could counter the rising Regents' House of the Fujiwara. The Confucian ideal honoured learned men who stood by their monarch. Michizane is a prime example of a courtier from a family of limited political influence but with a tradition of learning, who, through his usefulness as a scholar-bureaucrat, rose to a prominent position by the emperor's side, from which he could threaten Fujiwara dominance. Michizane's exile in 901, to the post of governor-general of the government's utmost western headquarters of Dazaifu, Kyushu, is symbolic both of the *bunshi* ideal and its eclipse in history by poets and authors in Japanese from the tenth century onwards. However, *kanshi* were certainly not restricted to the politically useful; in the hands of a versatile master such as Michizane they yielded moving testimonies to the poet's uncertainties or joys and gave shape to something very close to a personal voice.

Social codifications of poetic genre

In Heian Japan, the composition of poetry would gradually become a true art merited for its own sake, but it also remained a social act. One must distinguish between audiences and situations; the more formal the situation, the more formal the poem. This protocol centred on the idea that a good poem was a poem that was suitable to the atmosphere of its occasion. The poem's setting is traditionally described as the "place" (*ba*). Scholars revert to this traditional term to indicate the audience in an almost physical sense with the emphasis on where, rather than to whom, the poem was read. While the audience at different *ba* may be the same, it is understood that they will react differently according to the situation. A "place" expresses a sense of focus on audience *and* moment. The "place"

where poetry was performed was defined in social terms. This is made explicit in an encyclopaedic work from 1116, *Collections of our court and people* (*Chōya gunsai*). In this categorisation of document types, the scholar and poet Miyoshi no Tameyasu (1049-1139) distinguishes several situations, or rather "places", that require distinctly different styles or genres of poetry. His categorisation follows a social hierarchy which ranges from poetry composed at gatherings organized by emperors and retired emperors, gatherings hosted by high-ranking court nobles, to outings at shrines and temples, rituals for the worship of Confucius (*sekiten*), study groups (such as "society for the encouragement of learning" or *kangakue*, see below), and poetry exchanges.

Tameyasu writes specifically about Sino-Japanese poetry but the same case can be made for poetry in Japanese. From the Heian period onwards, Japanese court poetry and its moments of composition were divided into two categories, "formal" (*hare*) and "informal" (*ke*). The latter indicated poetry composed for everyday situations with low "visibility," such as casual exchanges, love poems, and letters. The former consisted of poems that were expressly intended for such public occasions as poetry contests, gatherings at the imperial palace, banquets, or folding screens. The distinction was not absolute and it might be better to speak of degrees of formality, as a "place" was either formal or less formal. It is in fact very likely that "informal" (*ke*) did not function as a category equal to "formal" (*hare*) in Heian Japan. One could speak about "formal poems" (*hare no uta*) but not about "informal poems" (*ke no uta*). This arrangement into degrees of formality held true both for *waka* and *kanshi* and by no means implied a value judgment, but emphasized the importance of the occasion for which a poem was composed.

One can assume that already the compilation committee of Japan's first royal *waka* anthology, *Collection of poems ancient and modern* (*Kokinshū*, commissioned 905), agreed that the anthology's structure should be ruled by social codes as much as by poetic principles—or rather, that poetic principles were to an extent socially defined. The royal anthologies should therefore not be simply regarded as collections of artistically superior poetry; nor were they necessarily seen as such by contemporary poets. When, in the course of the late eleventh century, poets increasingly began to formulate the notion of poetry as a "way" (*michi*) that should be assessed on its own terms, this notion did not

affect formal attitudes concerning the imperial anthologies. Compilers were never entirely free to select or ignore poets to their own liking. In his *Folio book* (*Fukuro zōshi*, ca. 1157), the poet Fujiwara no Kiyosuke (1104-1177) explicitly lectures that social status is a compelling principle in the compilation of an imperial anthology. "It is absolutely necessary to include poems by the highest-ranking nobles of one's time, even if their poems are not good," he writes on the topic of the compilation process, whereas "poets of the lowest class must not be included unless they are really famous."

In his encyclopaedic treatment of socially codified poetic genres, Tameyasu mentions only group activities. It illustrates how the communal nature of poetic practice in East Asia was far more pronounced than in Europe. In the case of *kanshi*, as was increasingly the case with *waka*, the act of poetry composition underlined a poet's association with the community of the cultured elite whose recognition and esteem could be won mainly through artistic and intellectual prowess. However, such prowess needed to be seen in action, as it were; the stage for that action consisted of the numerous poetry gatherings, not one's study, and lasting esteem was won by inclusion in one of the many anthologies that brought poets together, less so the private collections of individual poets.

Early examples of Sino-Japanese narrative texts

Not only poetry was generically classified by Heian literati. Textual categories were applied to the whole spectrum of Sino-Japanese literary production: rhyming prose (*mon* or *bun*), rhymeless prose (*hitsu*), preface (*jo*), rhyming poem (*shi*), poetic exposition (aka rhyme-prose; *fu*), couplet (*ku*), etc. The distinction between rhyme and non-rhyme was perhaps more important than a distinction between poetry and prose. These formal distinctions operated in the Sino-Japanese classification scheme; in *kana* texts, i.e. in Japanese (*wabun*), they were hardly used, let alone rigorously applied, which can cause confusion. In *The tale of Genji*, for example, the comprehensively used term *fumi* or (Sino-Japanse reading: *mon*) almost always refers to Chinese poetry, whereas the term *fude* (Sino-Japanese reading: *hitsu*) was reserved for prose. Suffice to say, that while poetry in is many forms was highly valued, prose, too, was written.

Ninth-century and early tenth-century writers in Sino-Japanese helped to give shape to narrative. An early instance of what through the Heian period would gradually become a significant genre, the *setsuwa* (religiously oriented anecdotal tales) is *Account of supernatural and strange stories in Japan* (*Nihon ryōiki*, between 810 and 824) by the monk Kyōkai (dates unknown), which is the earliest collection of Buddhist legends in Japan. *Legend of Urashima, continued* (*Zoku hotōshi [Urashima no ko] denki*, 920, expanded 932) and a variant text, *Legend of Urashima* (*Urashima no ko no den*, post-920), is a reworking in *kanbun* of what is today one of Japan's best known folktales, the legend of the fisherman Urashima Tarō who spent three happy years under the sea with a beautiful princess, the manifestation of a turtle he caught, only to discover that in his native village three centuries had past. The text shows thematic influences of such Tang narratives as *A dalliance in the immortals' den* (Ch. *You xianku*, Jp. *Yū senkutsu*) that circulated in Heian Japan.

[3.] Early Heian screen poetry

Given the ideological dominance of Sino-Japanese writings, the late eighth and ninth centuries are often referred to as "the dark age of *waka*," or, in an expression that priviliges writing in Japanese, "the dark age of national [poetic] style" (*kokufū ankoku jidai*). Indeed, the ninth century seems to form a period after *Man'yōshū* in which collections of *waka* seem conspicuously absent, while the court devoted much energy to the production of poetry in Sino-Japanese. By the end of the ninth century all this changed. The court took an active interest in *waka*, culminating, as we shall see, in the first state-sponsored *waka* anthology, and facilitated and even invited new forms in which this poetry could flourish, of which poetry matches (*utaawase*) and screen poems (*byōbu uta*) are the most prominent. Especially the latter quickly became an important genre in the early tenth century and is of special interest because of what it suggests about patterns and codifications of poetic imagination in classical Japan and its supposed influence on the development of narrative prose.

As the name suggests, screen poems were poems composed for folding screens. As standard yet luxurious furniture, such screens formed an important element in the physical space of a Heian courtier's home. As a rule they were covered with "screen paintings"

(*byōbu-e*) that depicted landscapes. Poems could be inscribed onto them, usually by writing the poem onto a sheet of coloured paper (*shikishi*) and pasting this sheet to a spot on the folding screen. No screens from the tenth century are extent and assumptions about them come from twelfth or thirteenth-century depictions and sparse contemporary descriptions in prose writings. Equally few contemporary sources exist about the production of screen poems or the ways in which they were appreciated. Yet it is clear that throughout the tenth century, poets in court circles produced a substantial body of poems that meant to interact with painted scenes on screens. It appears that screen poems were usually composed by expert poets of middling rank. The equation of poetic prowess and middling or even lower court status and the subsequent social appreciation of poetic expertise in the late eleventh century is a theme that will be addressed later in this chapter, but here it is important to stress the connection between the formulation of *waka*'s new codes and the relegation of its dedicated practice to those outside the elite ranks of court nobility.

The position of important poets in this period is well illustrated by the figure of Ki no Tsurayuki (868?-945). Out of the 864 *waka* in his personal poetry collection *Tsurayuki's collection* (*Tsurayuki shū*), 539, that is, a good sixty percent, are considered screen poems. His contemporary Ōshikōchi no Mitsune (active 894-921) has a comparable percentage of screen poems in his personal collection. Widely recognised as an expert poet and one of the compilers of the first royal *waka* anthology, Tsurayuki belonged to the group of lower courtiers (collectively known as *jige*) holding one of the bottom four out of the nine court ranks, which denied them the privilege of an audience with the emperor and put them at the low end of court ladder. As a rule, it is from this courtier class that one sees poets emerge who developed into experts of their craft. "Professionals" is a somewhat problematic term, as there seems to have been no direct relation between their remuneration and their poetry. However, as the case of screen poems make very clear, expert poets such as Tsurayuki were called on for their craft and sought ought with commissions for poems. Typically, painted screens were prepared as backdrop for celebrations of persons for high rank and several poets would be invited, or pressed, to contribute *waka* for them. In this context, Tsurayuki and others were likely conceived of as

"composers of poems" (*utayomi*) that function for the benefit of others. Throughout the Heian period and certainly by the late eleventh century the term *utayomi* acquired a somewhat depreciatory and slightly menial ring that emphasises the technical skill rather than the truly artistic recognition of a poet, in contrast to the more favourable expression *yomibito* or *kajin* ("poet").

While a good number of ninth-century poems in Sino-Japanese (*kanshi*) exist about, or specifically intended for, Chinese style paintings, be they on screens or murals (so-called *daigashi*), many screen *waka* are only categorized as such because of external information that confirms their relation to a screen. Also there is the likelihood that most poets, before composing a screen poem, never saw the painting in question but instead relied on descriptions of them. Furthermore, many topics for screen poems bear a direct relationship with the ritual calendar of court life (*nenjū gyōji*), in which the year cycle was organised around series of observances in close harmony with the progression of the seasons. In other words, the direct connection between a particular painting and a particular screen poem is not unproblematic and one may have to allow for the possibility that painted representations of landscapes and poems that fitted in with them could also work from more generic notions of ritual appreciation of nature and not necessarily function in a one-to-one relationship with each other.

The rise of screen *waka* is generally held to have been one of the formative influences on the rise of vernacular narrative prose from the tenth century onwards. The perspective of many of these poems appears to lie with a figure in the painted landscape; the assumption that a poet conceived of this painted scene as moment in a narrative results in the view that screen poems formed a genre that facilitated the creation of narrative sequences in imagined settings. Such scenes could be arranged into longer narrative sequences. In this way poetry collections that were sequentially arranged and projected as narratives grew into the genre of the poem-tale (*utamonogatari*), of which *The tales of Ise* (*Ise monogatari*) is best known.

[4.] The first royal poetry anthology in Japanese: *Collection of poems ancient and modern*

The rise of the *uta*, or *waka* as it came to be called, as the major literary genre of traditional Japan culminated early in the tenth century with *Collection of poems ancient and modern* (*Kokin wakashū*, usually abbreviated to *Kokinshū*). In 905 emperor Daigo (885-930, r. 897-930) ordered the compilation of the first royal anthology (*chokusenshū*) of poetry in Japanese. A committee of four men, consisting of Ki no Tsurayuki, Ki no Tomonori (dates unknown), Ōshikochi no Mitsune, and Mibu no Tadamine (dates unknown), went to work and by 914 the anthology is presumed to have been ready. The importance of *Collection of poems ancient and modern* and its canonical status in Japanese literary history cannot be overrated. It not only endorsed poetry in Japanese as major court literature, but also set a standard for both poetic form and thematic treatment that would influence *waka* composition and *waka* discourse for centuries to come. That after *Man'yōshū* it used the newly developed kana script is perhaps also symbolic of the break it represents with eighth-century poetry. This break is underscored by the two prefaces, one in Japanese (*kana*) and one in Sino-Japanese (*mana*), that sketch a history of *waka* that only takes on distinct shape with the ninth century; the only two *Man'yōshū* poets mentioned are Kaninomoto no Hitomaro (?-710?) and Yamabe no Akihito (?-736?).

Collection of poems ancient and modern changed the *waka* landscape in several ways. First of all, it emphatically brought *waka* back into the realm of state affairs and raised its status in the new court order to that of poetry in Chinese. The "*waka*" of the anthology's title was in a sense a new term. In the eighth century, the word had literally meant a "harmonising poem", one that worked in response to another poem, usually by a high-ranking person. With the name *Kokin wakashū*, "*waka*" lost this emphasis on responding to a pre-existing poem and it is quite possible that the *wa* in *waka* was used in distinction to "*kara-uta*", poems that were "Chinese" (*kara* or *kan*). This notion is strengthened by the opening words of the Japanese (*kana*) preface of the anthology: "Japanese song takes the human heart as its seed and flourishes as a myriad word leaves," whereby the expression "Japanese song" (*yamato no uta*) seems to spell out the term *waka*.

Secondly, at a very different formal level, the first royal anthology singled out the *tanka* or "short poem" as the near-exclusive format for *waka*, to the extent that "*waka*" came to be identified with *tanka*. Prosodically, the *waka* is a poem of 31 syllables, divided into a 5-7-5-7-7 syllable pattern, breaking the poem, rhythmically as well as syntactically, into two units, identified as the upper measure (*kami no ku*) and lower measure (*shimo no ku*). These two units often were two simple sentences, or formed the parsing of a compound sentence, that worked in a question-and-answer or observation-and-reaction relation. Two examples may make this clear. The first, from the ninth century, is a poem in which the poet cannot yet, but must learn to, accept the end of love affair. The first measure (the first three lines) give two rhetorical questions that suggest that while moon and season look the same as last year, they have somehow changed in the absence of the lover. The second measure plays the contrast with nature: only the poet has remained exactly the same as he longs just as much for the woman as before.

> When without intending to he became involved with a woman who lived in the western wing of a palace of the fifth avenue empress, she silently moved away just after the tenth of the first month. Although he asked where she now was, he could not send her word and in the following spring, when the plum blossoms were at their peak, on a night with the moon at its most delightful, he went to that western wing, yearning for the previous year, where he lay down on the planking until the moon slid down and composed:
>
> Ariwara no Narihira [825-880]

tsuki ya aranu	Is this then not that moon?
haru ya mukashi no	Is this spring then not that
haru naranu	spring of old?
waga mo hitotsu wa	Only this me, it seems, is really
moto no mi ni shite	just the same as then.

[*Collection of poems ancient and modern*, Book fifteen (Love 5)]

The second poem dates from the twelfth century. The first measure is a thoughtful observation of an emotional state: the poet, a monk, is supposed to have freed himself of worldly passions, he is "without a heart" (*kokoro naki*). Conversely, one might read: even one who has no sensitivity, a boor. The second measure is simply an observation of a nature scene. The connection between the poem's two measures, which as in so much late Heian and Kamakura poetry is not made explicit, is that the snipe (or snipes) taking flight is a poignant image that sets off a chain of musings.

Topic [and circumstances] unknown

Saigyō [1118-1190]

kokoro naki	Even one who is free
mi ni mo aware wa	of feeling cannot but know
shirarekeri	this sadness:
shigi tatsu sawa no	a snipe flying up from a marsh
aki no yūgure	in autumn twilight.

[*New collection of poems ancient and modern*, Book four (Autumn 1)]

This prosodic codification of courtly poetry in effect meant a considerable limitation of form and the ultimate rejection of pre-existing alternative prosodic formats. These alternatives did not altogether disappear, and continued to exist for example in the so-called "modern songs" (*imayō*) sung by entertainers of the Heian period; however, they were completely marginalised in *waka* discourse as it would develop from the tenth century onwards.

Thirdly, the anthology established love and the progression of the four seasons as *waka*'s main themes, and often as connected categorical themes at that. Nature imagery was imbued with emotional projection, and, conversely, emotions could find expression in nature imagery. The thematic restrictions went had in hand with restrictions of vocabulary and excluded words that were not Japanese or *kun* readings and as a rule avoiding Sino-Japanese terminology. With this first royal collection, *waka* established itself as poetry that knew a substantial number of formal limitations yet would prove extremely creative in its explorations of established themes. Regularly in *waka*'s history new themes would be

explored, but one may say that successful innovation of *waka*'s repertoire tended to work within or at the margins of convention.

Fourth, *Collection of poems ancient and modern* created new ways to categorise, and therefore also to appreciate, court poems. *Collection of poems ancient and modern* contains 1,111 poems thematically arranged in twenty 'books' (*maki* or *kan*). The organisation of these books, which differed significantly from that of the twenty books of *Man'yōshū*, became the model for subsequent royal anthologies as well as many private anthologies and personal poetry collections. The twenty books of *Collection of poems ancient and modern* are arranged as follows: spring (books 1-2; 134 poems), summer (3; 34), autumn (4-5; 145), winter (6; 29), felicitations (7; 22), parting (8; 41), travel (9; 16), wordplay ("names of things", *mono no na*; 10; 47), love (11-15; 360), grief (16; 34), [thematically] miscellaneous (17-18; 138), miscellaneous forms (19; 68), and "court poetry bureau" poems (20; 32). Within categories there is an organisational principle at work that arranges poems in a specific order. For example, the six books devoted to the four seasons progress from the first day of the year (according to the lunar calendar year, in place until 1873, the year began with spring) until the end of the year and the last day of winter. Within the five books devoted to love, poems are arranged to what would quickly become a standard progression of love glimpsed, love after meeting, fear of loss, sadness or despair at lost love and resignation. These arrangements form sustained sequences that are suggestive of narrative and the linking of *waka* and narration is one that can be observed often.

This embedding of *waka* in a narrative of sorts has an echo in the habit that the editors of *Collection of poems ancient and modern* had of supplying the poems with short introductions. Known as "headnotes" or sometimes as "foretext" (*kotobagaki*), such introductions appear already very frequently in *Man'yōshū*, where they normally sketch the occasion for which a poem was composed. This function the headnotes in *Kokinshū* also have, but they take on an additional function as well. They suggest a 'story', be it 'historical' (*e.g.* "composed for a poetry contest at the residence of prince Koresada") or more generically narrative (*e.g.* "composed when she sold her house"), in which the poem can function. The *waka* by Ariwara no Narihira quoted above is a rather extreme example of

such linking a *waka* to a story, and is in fact a modification of a section in *Tales of Ise*. In addition, a headnote will also very often name a "topic" (*dai*) to which the poem was composed. The ubiquitous presence of a "topic" in anthologies from the early tenth century onwards point to a major change in the composition practice, as well as function, of *waka*. Poets would often be supplied with a theme for their poems that took the form of a "topic" (f.e. "spring"); in Heian royal anthologies, this "topic composition" (*daiei*) would become the dominant type. Through the custom of topic composition, which went hand in hand with an ongoing further refinement of topics (f.e. "spring comes to the mountains"), Japanese poets developed sophisticated notions of the "essential nature" (*hon'i* or *ho'i*) of a topic and an equally sophisticated repertoire to capture this essence in the wording of a poem. Through this practice, ideas concerning the "essential nature" became an instrument of categorisation as well, in addition to the generic categories supplied by *Kokinshū*'s organisation. The editors of *Collection of poems ancient and modern* underscored the need for *waka* to be preceded by, or embedded in, a text by the frequent message "topic unknown" (*dai shirazu*). What was unknown in these cases was, as much as the poetic theme, the circumstances under which the poem was conceived. The narrative moment that should accompany a *waka* was then as much literary as it was social: as explained above, a sense of the social setting (*ba*, litt. "place") of the poetic act was essential in valuing a poem's achievements.

Until the fifteenth century twenty more royal anthologies would follow *Collection of poems ancient and modern*, the last of which was *New collection of poems ancient and modern, continued* (*Shinshoku kokin wakashū*, compilation ordered 1433, completed 1439). Although from the medieval period several critics were inclined to regard *Man'yōshū* as the first royal anthology, *Kokinshū* dictated the terms of court poetry with a public function and while these terms were constantly contested in the centuries to come, their challenges only mark the watershed that the first royal *waka* collection symbolised.

One intriguing aspect about royal anthologies of the Heian and Kamakura periods remains unsolved. It is unclear whether royal anthologies were formally distributed and this question bears on our understanding of their function. Royal anthologies circulated (*rufu-su*) and were read, needless to say, but it is uncertain whether that circulation was

deliberate state policy. While clearer information on the different versions of one and the same royal anthology dates from the eleventh century onwards, it is the case that the "circulating version" (*rufubon*) of these anthologies can differ, sometimes considerably, from the final and authorized version—the so-called "presented text" (*sōhon*, *sōranbon*, or *shinteibon*) or "proof text" (*shōhon*). In other words, the text of an anthology often reached its readers already before it was finalized and officially accepted by the monarch, and precisely for this reason there appears to have been a level at which circulation was not the ultimate goal of the anthology project. Perhaps then the meaning of a royal anthology was as much ritual as it was literary, with the circulated text as a 'residue'. This was an age in which the realm was regulated through ritual and in which royal anthologies were seen as one way to "govern the state" (*keikoku*) and mirroring good governance, a point repeatedly made in prefaces of these collections.

Be that as it may, royal anthologies undoubtedly also formed a corpus of important poetry that was to spawn a plethora of poetic commentaries and became staple training material for young poets. Among these, *Collection of poems ancient and modern* was always the pinnacle.

[5.] *Waka*'s flight

Poetry matches

One way to understand court *waka*'s history from the late ninth century onwards is to have an eye for the growing institutionalisation of its practise, with anthologies, both royal and private, with personal poetry collections, and with organised sessions at which poets met and composed their poems. The pace and proliferation of this institutionalisation grew rapidly throughout the Heian period and explains why so much Heian court poetry remains.

Much of *waka* practice as a public operation can be gleaned from an institution that was established at the Heian courts, namely the formal "poetry matches" (*utaawase*), in contrast to the less formal and usually small-scale "poetry gatherings" (*utakai*). 502 poetry matches from the period 885-1189 are known. Initially poems were supplementary to other objects being matched as a court pastime (*monoawase*), such as flowers or paintings.

From the very early tenth century onwards poetry matches adhered to a fixed format that took its cue from the oldest recorded match specifically for poetry, the *Poetry match at the Teiji-in* (*Teiji-in utaawase*) of 913, at the residence of retired emperor Uda (867-931, r. 887-897). Contestants were divided into two teams (*kata*), Left and Right, in which men and women could participate equally. Names of participants were supposedly kept secret, but did end up on the transcript afterwards. Poets from each team would submit a poem to a series of topics (*dai*), read out not by the poet but by the team's "reciter" (*kōji*), and sometimes first checked for flaws by the team's "reader" (*dokushi*); each confrontation of poems constituted a "round" (*ban*). One or more judges (*hanja*) would declare a win (*katsu*) or draw (*ji*), based on at times extensive comments that were written up in "judgments" (*hanshi*).

Poetry matches were highly ritualised, accompanied by the carrying in of miniature landscapes (*suhama*) and music, and formed a typical example of a formal setting (*hare no ba*) for *waka*. Typically, the judgements would reflect this formality and focus on spotting inappropriate expressions and deviations from decorum and custom; poems often won because the adversary's poem was disqualified on technical grounds. Nevertheless, the matches also became a ground were different views of poetic craft could be contested. Increasingly, poetry matches would become an instrument to generate poetry that could at some point end up in an anthology. This development is reflected in the make-up of the participants. Early on social status and decorum was more important than talent or artistic vision, a notion reflected in a remark by retired sovereign Uda, who acted as judge in 913: "the poem of the left team is my own; how could it lose?" Gradually, however, expert poets of lower rank were to enter the teams in greater numbers, to eventually replace high-ranking amateur poets. With this development, poetic strife entered the formal arena, as we shall see.

The formal matches, like any event full of splendour, underscored the prestige of their organisers; high-ranking nobles would be as eager as emperors and retired sovereigns to arrange contests. Such events mixed the artistic and the ostentatious and presented the hosts as patrons of refinement in a climate in which refinement was part of power play. Little wonder then, that sponsorship would eventually lead up to matches of

unrivalled scale such as the regent Fujiwara no Yoshitsune's (1169-1206) *Poetry match in six hundred rounds* (*Roppyakuban utaawase*, ca. 1194) and the truly megalomaniacal *Poetry match in fifteen hundred rounds* (*Sengohyakuban utaawase*, ca. 1202) organised by retired monarch Go-Toba (1180-1239).

More royal anthologies

By the mid-ninth century, another unprecedented moment in *waka* history occurred. At the end of the tenth month of 951, the reigning emperor Murakami (926-967, r. 946-967) commissioned a team of five men to compile yet another royal *waka* anthology. This commission led to a long line of state anthologies of *waka*, but at this time the notion of such a follow-up for was still a novel idea. Again, the compilers were low ranking bureaucrats and scholars, all of whom had a recognised claim to poetic expertise. They were provided with an office in the Nashitsubo palace quarters and consequently became known as "five men of the Pear Chamber" (*nashitsubo no gonin*). The new anthology was named *Later collection of poems* (*Gosen wakashū*) and presumably the committee finished its compilation work by 954 if not earlier. An additional task of the committee was to provide glosses to and transcriptions of the poems in *Man'yōshū*.

Again in twenty books and with 1,425 poems, with overwhelming space for seasonal and love poetry, the *Later collection* nevertheless contains a number of points on which it differs from the first royal anthology. Curiously, none of the compilers is represented with a poem and *Later collection* lacks a preface. More importantly, it features many long headnotes that provide narrative settings for the poems. There exists a debate that sees headnotes in *Later collection* as predominantly narrated in "third person," in contrast to other royal anthologies that present a "first person" point of view in the headnotes. While not uncontroversial, such a view underscores the importance of *Later collection* as an anthology that goes hand in hand with the development of poem tales (*utamonogatari*) in the tenth century.

As hinted above, at a very different level royal anthologies from the beginning developed a structure that was honed and refined throughout the centuries and became the model for many privately sponsored anthologies and personal poetry collections. This

organisational level might be termed "narrative", too, but that would be slightly misleading, although certainly entire books of the anthology and sets of poems within them were construed as coherent sequences and provided not quite a narrative but a coordinated thematic movement. Poems on the four seasons followed the natural progression from early spring to late winter, but could focus on, for example, a sequence trying out different aspects of "ice". Compilers were obviously more interested in creating sequences that formed a unity than in presenting individual poets or highlighting historical periods. Such sequencing is a uniquely Japanese organisational principle that is not seen in Chinese anthologies of the time.

A century after the first royal anthology, a third such collection was put together, entitled *Collection of gleanings* (*Shūi wakashū*, 1005-1007). Coinciding with now famous narrative texts in Japanese such as *The tale of Genji* and Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow book*, it was soon seen as an important marker of royally sanctioned poetry. Together with *Collection of poems ancient and modern* and *Later collection*, it became referred to, at least from the early twelfth century onwards, as "the collections of the three reigns" (*sandaishū*) epitomizing the best of three glorious ages of monarchs Daigo, Murakami and Kazan, but presumably also to mimic the older Sino-Japanese "collections of the three reigns". Despite its early canonical status, little is known of the circumstances of the compilation of *Collection of gleanings*. As of the end of the eleventh century, at least, the anthology was attributed to the retired emperor Kazan (968-1008, r. 984-986), which would make this a truly exceptional project: a royal anthology single-handedly compiled by a sovereign. A contemporaneous mirror anthology exists, *Notes for a collection of gleanings* (*Shūishō*, presumably 996-999) by a famed poet, statesman and *arbiter elegantiarum* Fujiwara no Kintō (966-1041), containing 579 poems that overlap to a degree with *Collection of gleanings*. However, this title might also be rendered as *Extracts from a collection of gleanings*, and it is unclear whether Kintō, whose younger sister was married to Kazan, conceived of his collection as preparatory ground for the royal anthology or whether it was in fact a selection of poems culled from that collection; favour now rests with the former assumption. Not surprisingly, the two collections have often been confused. Not only that, but the official status of *Collection of gleanings* as royal anthology is also unclear, as there is

no record of commission, selection process or presentation to the throne. Although Heian courtiers never seemed to have doubted its royal status, the same might be said of Kintō's *Notes for a collection of gleanings*; it was not until the early thirteenth century that poet and editor Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241) established the pre-eminence of Kazan's anthology and marked Kintō's anthology as an abridged version thereof.

Once again organized in twenty books, *Collection of gleanings* with its 1,351 poems is perhaps the first royal anthology that favours certain poetic circles (*kadan*), in this case, unsurprisingly, especially the circle of Kazan, who was an avid poet, although the abdicated monarch himself is not represented. Poets favoured in this collection often belong to Kazan's clique, such as Fujiwara no Nagayoshi (or Nagatō, 949-1009), Minamoto no Michinari (?-1019) and Kintō, but it also makes room for the 'eccentric' poet Sone no Yoshitada (923?-1003?). Screen poetry again has much prominence in this anthology. It also pays considerable attention to *Man'yōshū* poetry, especially by Kakinomoto no Hitomaro (104 poems included), presumably building on the philological work of the *Later collection* selection committee.

Private anthologies

Kintō' s *Notes for a collection of gleanings* is an example of a development in which poets would, with increasing speed and on an increasing scale and of increasing complexity, sample poems of their taste in privately compiled anthologies (*shisenshū*). Sixteen such anthologies are extant today for the Heian period, although eleven of these are post-1000. The purpose of such anthologies was manifold. A rare case is the aborted royal anthology *Collection of word flowers, continued* (*Shokushika wakashū*, 1165). It was put together by the poet Fujiwara no Kiyosuke and took its name from the sixth imperial anthology compiled by Kiyosuke's father Akisuke (1090-1155), the *Collection of word flowers* of the early 1150s. The anthology was practically finished when its commissioner emperor Nijō (1143-1165) suddenly died in 1165 before its official submission. As a result, it was never accepted as a royal collection. Conversely, private anthologies might be "anti-collections", compiled as a dissatisfied response to a royal anthology, as is the case with Fujiwara no Akinaka's *Collection of genuine jewels* (*Ryōgyokushū*, 1126?, no longer extant) and *Later*

collection of leaves (*Goyōshū*, 1155 or shortly thereafter), compiled by Fujiwara no Tametsune (aka Jakuchō, ca. 1113-?), which were critiques of respectively the fifth and sixth royal anthologies. *Later collection of leaves* in turn was criticized in *Shepherd's flute* (*Bokuteki ki*, no longer extant) by Kiyosuke.

However, most private anthologies functioned either as repositories of important reference material for poets or as the collective effort of a poetic circle. In this way, anthologies became an instrument in defining poetic taste. The first anthologies belong to this first category, while private *waka* anthologies that brought together work of poets close to their compiler only took shape after the year 1000, more or less coinciding with *Collection of gleanings* and *Notes for a collection of gleanings*. Early examples include *Deepest of the deep collection* (*Gengenshū*, ca. 1046?) by the poet-monk Nōin (988-ca. 1050) that focuses on 92 contemporary poets from the period 990-1045 and *Lovely blossoms collection* (*Reikashū*, 1005-1007).

The earliest extant private anthology of the Heian period, preceding the 905 commission of the royal *Collection of poems ancient and modern*, is a hybrid work combining *waka* with Sino-Japanese verse. *Newly selected Man'yōshū* (*Shinsen man'yōshū*, 893 [first book] and 913 [second book]) has been attributed to Sugawara no Michizane and despite its title was obviously not conceived as follow-up to the eighth-century *Man'yōshū*. The anthology is an early example of the Heian trend to juxtapose poetry in the two script-languages; it presents a good 250 binary sets of anonymous quatrains and *waka* on the same theme. In a way, the *Shinsen man'yōshū*, especially its first volume, is best explained as an inverted *Verse topic poems* (*Kudai waka*, 894), which consists of a series of *waka* by Ōe no Chisato (active late ninth and early tenth century), each composed to a Chinese couplet or a single Chinese line of poetry (*kudai*), and which Chisato compiled from his own poems at the behest of emperor Uda.

Another important and massive example is *Six quires of poems ancient and modern* (*Kokin waka rokujō*, late tenth century), which contains 4,499 poems by more than two hundred poets. Over half of its poems are culled from *Man'yōshū* and the remainder from the first two royal anthologies, *Collection of poems ancient and modern* and *Later collection*. As with *Collection of gleanings*, the inclusion of *Man'yōshū* poems may very well have been

made possible through editorial work by the *Later collection*'s compilation committee. What sets it apart is its organisation of poems within the four categories of "heaven" (*ten*), "earth" (*chi*; subdivided in "mountains", "paddies", "fields", and "water"), "human matters" (*jin*; subdivided in "love", "celebration", "parting", and others), and "grasses, insects, trees, and birds" (*sō-chū-moku-chō*). *Six quires* took its organisation from *Six quires [of poems] by Mr Bai* (*Baishi liutie*; Jp. *Hakushi rokujō*), but also from reference works such as *Categorized notes on Japanese words* (*Wamyō ruijūshō*, ca. 934; see below). The idea was to provide a systematic survey of potential topic-categories for *waka* composition with appropriate examples. Other Heian examples of topical organisation of poems already known from other collections include the earliest classified compilation of *Man'yōshū* poems, *Classified ancient collection* (*Ruijū koshū*, early twelfth century), and perhaps best known, Kintō's *Japanese and Chinese poems to sing* (*Wakan rōeishū*, early eleventh century; see below).

The categorisation in *Six quires of poems ancient and modern* points to an important concept in East Asian poetry composition, that of categorical association (Ch. *lei*, Jp. *rui*). In traditional East Asia a poem was conceived as a verbal manifestation of shared feelings and it implied a regulated codification of signs. A reader was supposed to recognise the appropriate imagery and its shared associations and therefore could read the poem as the poet had intended it. In Chinese and Sino-Japanese verse, but by extension this is true for *waka* as well, the principle of categorical association was the regulating force in this process. An image in a poem referred the reader to a larger category of which this image formed a part, a category of associated imagery and emotions. At the same time, it called to mind any other particular case from that same category. As one scholar wrote, to see a single leave fall was to know autumn; to know autumn was to know its correlatives in the cycle of human life and in all domains of reference. The *waka* by Saigyō quoted above works along such lines: the snipe taking flight in autumn dusk sets in motion a chain of associations with closing cycles in all domains; which is why the poet feels "moved" (*aware*) by this image. Since an image was connected with a variety of phenomena that all belonged to the same emotional register, there was no need to explicitly state the emotions corresponding to the imagery. This is why the stock images of for example banquet poetry were more important than the specifics of the individual banquet.

In order to master these registers of categorical association, poets and readers alike could refer to anthologies that rubricized imagery and examples of its usage. The royal anthologies provided one model of rubrication (f.e. seasonal progression, stages of a love affair), but collections such as *Six quires* did so on a more minute scale. The patterns of the association were not fixed, but developed along set lines within a given frame. Such patterns became firmly tied to the concept of *hon'i* (or *ho'i*, "essential nature") as it was to be developed throughout the late Heian period and to which poets increasingly referred at poetry matches and in treatises. The idea of a *hon'i* of a *waka* topic was founded in the belief that through the appropriate use of imagery one could approach the most characteristic aspect of that topic. This meant that if a poet was to compose a *waka* that expressed its topic in the best possible way, she or he had to limit himself to given sets of imagery. The notion of *hon'i* blended with the concurrent development of *waka* composition to set topics (*daiei*), be they lines of Chinese verse (*kudai*) or single or compound characters (*musubidai*), and was a compelling force in categorizing not merely imagery but poetic expression as a whole. Poetic innovation therefore predominantly lay in pushing the boundaries of categorical association, not in devising entirely new sets.

A very specific subgenre of the private anthology was formed by collections of poems by a limited number of poets, usually six, thirty or thirty-six. The idea for such groupings dates back to the preface of *Collection of poems ancient and modern* that selected six early Heian poets as outstanding poets, but Fujiwara no Kintō set the precedent with his *Selected poems of thirty-six poets* (*Sanjūrokunin sen*, ca. 1009-1012), which focused on poets from *Man'yōshū* up until the tenth century. The Heian period produced quite a number of variations to Kintō's "excellent poets" anthology, including *The late classical six immortal poets* (*Chūko rokkasen*, 1178-1188) and *Later selection of thirty-six poets* (*Nochinochi no rokurokusen*, var. *Chūko sanjūrokkasen*, mid-twelfth century). The popularity of this format would, in the Kamakura period, spur versions that were accompanied by portraits of thirty-six immortal poets (*sanjū rokkasen-e*).

Personal poetry collections as poetic memoirs

As *waka* collections became a dominant literary form in the early tenth century, one also sees the tentative rise of personal *waka* collections (*shikashū*). Referred to as "house collections" (*ie no shū* or *kashū*), these were the repositories of the output of a single poet, compiled either by the poet her or himself or posthumously by a close relative. The first were prompted by royal request, such as Ōe no Chisato's *Verse topic poems* of 894 or with an eye to the compilation of *Collection of poems ancient and modern*. Increasing in pace as time progressed, the total number of Heian personal collections is very large. Of most poets, only one such collection exists and it did not necessarily contain all of a poet's output, but rather offered a somehow representative sampling. Personal collections vary considerably in length; some contain over a 1,600 poems, such as Minamoto no Toshiyori's (1055?-1128?) *Collection of poems [as useless as] dead wood* (*Sanboku kikashū*), while there are also those than contain barely a handful, like that of Toshiyori's grandmother (984?-1045?), *Collection of Lord Tsunenobu's mother* (*Tsunenobu-kyō no haha shū*, eleventh century), with merely 15 poems. *Kanshi* poets already compiled "house collections" in the ninth century, as we have seen; the formal recognition of *waka* as a major poetic form evidently paved the way for similar individual collections of poetry in Japanese. The importance of attaching a "house collection" to a poet of name also led to the creation, or perhaps recreation, of personal collections that did not yet exist, as happened in the late tenth century with *Hitomaro's collection* (*Hitomaro kashū*), which after almost three centuries brought together poems by or attributed to this *Man'yōshū* poet. These personal collections were read quite widely and are indicative of a growing sense of a tradition with which poets were in dialogue. Compilers of anthologies, of course, made grateful use of personal collections for their own editorial work.

Like royal anthologies these "house collections" usually were organized in terms of sequences, although sometimes this was merely an arrangement in chronological order of composition; randomly compiled collections also exist. It is in their sequencing that the personal collections reveal something of the development of personal collections as a memento to a poet's life. In the house collections, too, poems are often accompanied by headnotes and these provided considerable information on the poet and her or his

background. While the arrangement of well-structured personal collections of early Heian poets is quite likely often the result of later editorial intervention, the resulting whole can offer a collection that read more like a poetic memoir than a poem collection.

This is true for example of *Lady Ise's collection* (*Ise shū*), which opens with a long, sustained sequence of poems that are accompanied by lengthy headnotes that together present a poem tale-like narrative in the third person of several years in the life of the poet Lady Ise (875?-after 938). An extreme example of such narrativation is the opening of *August collection of the first ward regent* (*Ichijō sesshō gyoshū*, first part ca. 950, second part after 992), which presents a poem-tale narrated in third person in which the fictitious low-ranking official Kurahashi no Toyokage acts as the author of poems by the regent Fujiwara no Koremasa (924-972), exchanging love poetry with several women at court. The remaining 153 poems in this personal collection were probably added after Koremasa's death. Alternatively, *Collection of Murasaki Shikibu* (*Murasaki Shikibu shū*) by the author of *The tale of Genji*, presents a carefully edited series of almost 130 poems that form a mini-autobiography stressing the emotional development and cool self-appraisal of its author. *Collection of Lady Daibu* (*Kenreimon'in Ukyō no Daibu no shū*, somewhere between ca. 1220-1234) by Kenreimon'in Ukyō no Daibu (1155?-1234?) was composed in the early Kamakura period, but partly covers the last years of the Heian period and may be included here. A lyrical evocation of her life at court covering about half a century (ca. 1174-ca. 1234), this long text is a true memoir that pushes itself forward through poetry and gives ample space to long sections of poetry uninterrupted by reflective passages. *Collection of the mother of the Buddhist teacher Jōjin* (*Jōjin ajari no haha shū*, 1071-1073) contains 175 poems that are at times interspersed by long prose passages. The overarching theme is the poet's affection for her son, the monk Jōjin (1011-1081) who in 1072 went to China on a pilgrimage (and was fated never to return). The poetic account by Jōjin's mother starts with her apprehension at her son's decision to leave for China and presents a moving as well as technically skilful sequence of thematically unified *waka*.

Incidentally, Jōjin's disciples brought back his *kanbun* journal of the first two years of his stay in China, *Record of a pilgrimage to Tiantai and Wushan mountains* (*San Tendai-Godaisan ki*, 1072-1073). Taken together with other journals by monks travelling through

China, such as Ennin's (794-864) *Record of a pilgrimage to Tang China in search of the law* (*Nittō guhō junrei kōki*, 838-847), Chōnen's (938-1016) *Record of Chōnen in China* (*Chōnen zaitōki*, 983-986) and *Record of a voyage to Song China* (*Tosōki*, 1082-1083) by Kaikaku (late eleventh century), Jōjin's journal provides a unique knowledge of the conditions of daily life in contemporary China.

If these house collections are "poetic memoirs", then there also exist texts that suggest a house collection but read like a poem tale. *The collection of Hon'in no Jijū* (*Hon'in no Jijū shū*, ca. 971) consists of a series of poems describing an unsuccessful love affair between the future regent Fujiwara no Kanemichi (925-977) and his older cousin, Hon'in no Jijū, who serves as lady-in-waiting to an empress. Authorship of this text is unclear, albeit that Hon'in no Jijū (active ca. 935-960) is favoured as author; the poems are generally considered authentic even if Kanemichi has no independent reputation as a poet.

Conventional genre identifications often prove not very useful when mapping the textual ground of Heian *kana* texts. Text books, like the one you are reading now, tend to parade the distinctions between personal poetry collection (*kashū*), autobiographical "diary" or memoir (*nikki*), "poem tale" (*utamonogatari*) and "tale" (*monogatari*) as readily discernible genres. These terms indeed were used by Heian and later readers indicate a particular type of text. However, one and the same text may fall in either category, and this fluidity of genre is enforced by the fact that a text might accumulate multiple names as time went by. Sequentially arranged (parts of) poetry collections could grow by expansion of the headnotes into longer narrative passages and become a poem-tale (*utamonogatari*). This is, in fact, the process by which *Tales of Ise* became the text we know today. This poem tale is centred around poems by, or attributed to, the poet Ariwara no Narihira (825-880), which is why the nameless protagonist of the tale is identified with him. The textual history of this poem tale is difficult, but scholars generally assume a pre-existing ninth-century *Narihira's collection* (*Narihira shū*), now lost, that was posthumously reworked in several stages throughout the first half of the tenth century into a sequential structure with expanded headnotes, a process referred to as "tale-ifying" (*monogatarika*) and yet again in the eleventh century knew further editorial interventions, explicitly identifying the protagonist with Ariwara no Narihira. The version now commonly used goes back the

work of the poet and editor Fujiwara no Teika (1162-1241), who had a major role in the ordering of the different sections (*dan*).

A reference in *The tale of Sagoromo* (*Sagoromo monogatari*, eleventh century) shows that Heian readers alternatively knew *Tales of Ise* as *Memoirs of the Ariwara middle captain of the fifth rank* (*Zaigo chūjō no nikki*). Several other texts from the tenth century and early eleventh century exist that went by different names, all making clear that narrative sequences that gave great weight to poems associated with one person could be called both a "house collection" and a "memoir" as well as a "tale". What is, of course, conspicuous about these examples is that their genre designation hinges not only on how one views the relationship between poetry and prose and their respective share of the text's nature, but also on the question whether these texts are seen as autobiographical.

[6.] Writing the self: ego documents

Heian Japan is the first period in Japanese history to produce a substantial number of texts that can be grouped together as "ego documents". This neologism, originally coined in the early 1950s by the Dutch historian Jacques Presser, indicates a generic and relatively neutral term for the many varieties of texts that can somehow be seen as expressing actions, thoughts and emotions of the author. Intended as a concept for the writing of social and cultural histories, the concept of ego documents has the advantage of sidestepping questions of literary hierarchy or perceived literary nature of texts and therefore considering in conjunction texts that often are seen as belonging to either the realm of history or of literature studies.

While not, or not always, strictly speaking "autobiographical" texts, the ninth through twelfth centuries saw the rise of genres that do suggest an interest in recording personal histories, if not personal voices, some of which have always been regarded as literary texts. One might see the emergence of personal poetry collections or 'memoirs' (*shikashū* or *kashū*) in that light, as these can be said to create a poet's personalised voice by their emphasis on the output of one individual and embedding this voice in her or his life, but more obvious as ego documents are the different categories of courtiers' journals and personal memoirs by aristocratic women. Both groups of texts are known under the

rubric of "*nikki*" (occasionally: *niki*), a term that literally translates as "daily notes" and is traditionally rendered as "diary." It is the personal memoirs by court ladies that early on helped to give Heian literature its place in world literature, but for a sense of historical perspective it is useful to look at the development of these different but related groups of texts.

Sino-Japanese journals

By far the largest and oldest group of diaries are journals kept by courtiers on a more or less day-to-day basis. Such journals were first kept as official records, by Secretaries (*geki*) of the Council of State (*daijōkan*), as early as 780. By 1067, the court's Bureau of Books (*zushoryō*) had amassed close to two hundred scrolls of such "secretaries' journals" (*geki nikki*). These served as material for the compilation of official histories, beginning with the "six histories of the realm" (*rikkokushi*), all in Sino-Japanese: *Annals of Japan* (*Nihon shoki*, 720), *Annals of Japan, continued* (*Shoku nihongi*, 797), *Later annals of Japan* (*Nihon kōki*, 840), *Later annals of Japan, continued* (*Shoku nihon kōki*, 866), *Veritable record of emperor Montoku of Japan* (*Nihon Montoku tennō jitsuroku*, 879), and *Veritable record of three reigns of Japan* (*Nihon sandai jitsuroku*, 901), but also in later unofficial histories such as *Abridged annals of Japan* (*Nihon kiryaku*, late eleventh century) and *Annals of our court* (*Honchō seiki*, 1150s). The institution of state ordered journals led to the creation of journals by courtiers not overtly intended for state purposes. The first extant examples of these are journals kept by, intriguingly, emperors themselves but also by high-ranking courtiers, such as *Journal of the sage and loyal minister* (*Teishinkō ki*, 907-948) by the powerful statesman Fujiwara no Tadahira (880-949). Some hundred of these journals from the Heian period have been preserved, albeit often in only fragmentary form. Gradually, courtiers of lesser rank also began to keep journals, spurting an impressive mass of documentation of a wide variety of Heian court life. Incidentally, such journals were kept by Japanese authors until well into the eighteenth century.

These records share several characteristics, in organisation as well as gendered notions of script. To start with the latter, the extant journals are all written in Sino-Japanese (*kanbun*) and their authors are male. However, there are some indications that in

the ninth and early tenth centuries the empress's office employed female secretaries who kept daily records of matters pertaining to the empress's affairs. These records, of which only one is partially extant, were presumably written in *kana*, albeit possibly as translations, or transcriptions, into *kana* from entries in Sino-Japanese court journals, implying the possibility of a great degree of understanding by female functionaries of Sino-Japanese in this period. The one identifiable example of this would be *Journal of the dowager queen-consort* (*Taikō gyoki* or *Taikō onki*, early tenth century), which is no longer extant except in excerpts that are quoted in *Notes of the western palace* (*Saikyūki*, late tenth century), a private manual on court ritual by Minamoto no Takaakira (914-982), and *Notes on rivers and seas* (*Kakaishō*, a fourteenth-century commentary to *The tale of Genji*). These remnants are in Japanese (*kana*), but there is a debate as to whether the record was originally written in Sino-Japanese. Nonetheless, the genre of the journal was, in gender terms, a masculine affair.

The basic organisation of the Sino-Japanese journals is chronological, as may be expected from a day-to-day record. Entries first mention the date, the weather, and move on to a terse description of events of the day, usually carefully noting who was involved in them in what capacity. Exemplified by *Journal of the Midō chancellor* (*Midō kanpaku ki*, intermittently covering the period 998-1021) by Fujiwara no Michinaga (966-1027), *Spring journal* (*Shunki*, 1026-1054) by Fujiwara no Sukefusa (1007-1057) or *Journal of the minister of the right* (*Chūyū ki*, (1087-1138) by Fujiwara no Munetada (1062-1141), *kanbun* journals at first sight make for rather dull reading in their exhaustive and meticulous attention to detail of court routine and ceremonial. An important function of these journals was to provide the author's heirs with a significant body of data that both proved the family's often long-standing involvement in court affairs and provided a catalogue of precedent for ritualised court life. Yet although the occasional dramatic moment does occur (life being stranger than fiction), it is precisely the authors' selective observation of and intermittent reactions to events that highlight the importance of decorum and custom in court life.

The Tosa journal

That in the tenth century day-to-day journals written in *kanbun* were deemed a masculine type of text is emphasized by a text that straddles the two genres of journal and memoir usually identified with the term *nikki*. While presumably not the oldest "diary" by a female narrator, *Tosa journal* (*Tosa nikki*, ca. 945) is the oldest extant text that may be seen as a memoir written in Japanese. It is also an illustration of how the memoir genre was yet to take literary shape; *Tosa journal* is a literary experiment in several ways. In the opening line the narrator states, "I thought that a woman might try one of those 'diaries' that men are said to write." The persona of the narrator is a woman, who in *kana*, rather than in Sino-Japanese that she professes not to understand, ventures out in a literary form that she from the outset identifies as masculine. However, the text's author was a man, Ki no Tsurayuki (868?-945?). One of the compilers of royal anthology *Poems ancient and modern* and therefore associated with the cause of poetry in Japanese (*waka*), Tsurayuki was a court official of middling rank who had finished his tour of duty as provincial governor in Tosa province (southern Shikoku) and travelled back to the capital in 934. It is this return journey that *Tosa journal* describes. The author also figures in the text, in the third person, as the narrator is a woman in the governor's entourage. The text is organised by day-to-day entries, as one would expect from a journal, and contains may poems attributed to various members of the travel party. Next to scant observations of landscape and sights along the way that mostly function as a trigger for poetry composition, one recurrent theme is grief over the governor's daughter, who died in Tosa.

Tosa journal plays to multiple agendas: notions of genre, notions of fiction and non-fiction, notions of writing systems, the use of poetry, grief over the loss of a child, among others, and all this in a narrative voice that forces the reader to think about these agendas in relation to gender. The narrator is a woman, but the author is man; diaries are kept by men, but the narrator will try it "as a woman"; diaries are written in Sino-Japanese, but this one will be in Japanese; diaries are semi-public and focus on official life, but *Tosa journal* is filled with more private musings and observations. Throughout early modern and modern history, much has been made of the objective of this relatively short text; all of these start from assumptions that identify gendered sets of notions of writing. As explained before,

these hinge on the identification with writing in Sino-Japanese as masculine, and writing in *kana* as feminine and inherent notions of femininity and masculinity. Explanations to why Ki no Tsurayuki chose a woman as narrator therefore range from the early modern suggestion that it was "unmanly" for Tsurayuki to show grief over the death of his daughter and that the woman's persona did the job admirably, to the nationalistic interpretation that Tsurayuki as a champion of poetry as well as prose in Japanese challenged the hegemony of Sino-Japanese writing by the "incongruous" female persona and its humoristic effect as a means to undermine the authority of *kanbun* and *kanshi*. The possibility that Tsurayuki in a playful way wrote as a man for other men and that his use of *kana* prose flagged the lightheartedness of his experiment is yet another possibility, one that may help to explain how *Tosa journal* did not become a model for memoir writers. The fact remains that, although *Tosa journal* is seen as inexorably tied to the "diaries" as memoir type of text by Heian aristocratic women, and, as the earliest surviving example, somehow but problematically its near-beginning, Tsurayuki's text is in many ways actually unrelated to what are regarded as the prime examples of classical autobiographic writing in Japanese.

Kana memoirs

On the contrary, an early text that did set the parameters of the memoir genre as practiced in the Heian period is *Gossamer years* (*Kagerō nikki*, tenth century). Covering the period 954-974, its author, known as "Michitsuna's mother" (Michitsuna no Haha, 936?-995?), describes the history of her wooing by, marriage to and finally divorce from an ambitious statesman, Fujiwara no Kaneie (929-990). As Kanie's second wife, she bears him a son, but feels that he quickly looses interest in her as well as their child. Much of the text deals with the narrator's frustration at her bad marriage and her sensitivity to her husband's relationships with his other wives, especially those that she perceives as lesser consorts, whom she criticises openly. Her husband's first wife is too safe in her position to be openly criticised by the narrator, but presents a looming threat by doing exactly what, in the view of their families, aristocratic wives were expected to do: give birth to many children, ideally sons, who continue the family fortune. One of this first wife's sons is Fujiwara no

Michinaga, who become the court's most powerful politician and cultural broker; two of her granddaughters would become empresses.

Gossamer years is as much about the women Michitsuna's mother feels threatened by and compares herself to as it is about her relationship to her husband. Her anxiety about her place in the social fabric of aristocratic life pervades the whole of the memoir. Its author has earned herself a reputation as a jealous and slightly hysterical wife obsessed with her marriage, thereby developing the archetypal image of the Heian lady vainly waiting at home for her lover-husband, the contours of which were already known in the "waiting woman" motif in poetry. However, the text is subtly structured, juxtaposing the retrospective survey with Buddhist overtones of the narrator's life with her emotions as she experienced them at the time. *Gossamer years* is extremely successful in creating a voice for a female narrator in a new, introspective language. Its importance certainly lies in this pioneering role as one true *Ur*-text of female writing in Japan.

Manuscripts of *Gossamer years* end with an attachment consisting of the personal poetry collection of Michitsuna's mother, highlighting the link between the memoir and the "house collection" genre, which in itself is often regarded as "poetic memoir". The poetry collection emphasizes another side of the author, namely her skills as poet operating in the semi-public sphere, and thereby implicitly stress the literariness of the *Gossamer years*. It was through these poems that in the medieval period (thirteenth through sixteenth centuries) she reached status as one of the so-called "thirty-six poetic geniuses of the classical age" (*chūko sanjūrokasen*).

The *Memoirs of Izumi Shikibu* (*Izumi Shikibu nikki*, eleventh century) is a slightly later but at first sight similar text, in that it plays to the same sort of anxiety of a female protagonist about her lover's attitude and actions, or lack thereof, albeit very different in tone. It is a tale describing the historical love affair between the well-known poet and lady-in-waiting Izumi Shikibu (974?-1030?) and her lover, Prince Atsumichi (981-1007), during a period of ten months starting in the fourth month of 1003. Tradition holds the text to be autobiographical rather than a *vie romancée* of the poet's affair, although this is difficult to prove beyond a doubt. This very uncertainty, which is exacerbated by the fact that the text is written entirely in the third person, poses questions about the parallels between the

memoir and fictional genres. The *Memoirs of Izumi Shikibu* contains 145 poems, for the better part exchanges between Izumi and her prince; many of them are found in Izumi Shikibu's personal poetry collection. By the prominence given to the poem exchanges one is reminded of the poem-tale (*uta monogatari*) genre.

Contemporary with Izumi Shikibu's poems and her scandalous love affair is *Memoirs of Murasaki Shikibu* (*Murasaki Shikibu nikki*, early eleventh century). Like Izumi serving under Empress Shōshi, Murasaki Shikibu wrote an account that is largely concerned with the year 1008, starting with the birth of Shōshi's son and imperial heir, who provided Shōshi's father Fujiwara no Michinaga with an essential control over court affairs. It is thought that this part of the account was in fact commissioned by Michinaga, who had been instrumental in securing Murasaki a place in his daughter's salon at court. Indeed, the parts that describe the prince's birth as well as the general lustre of Shōshi's salon are conceivably begun as a tribute to the power of the Fujiwara Regents' House to which Murasaki's patrons belonged. However, the text, haphazard as it is in its present state, swerves from what can be construed as supportive of the powers that created the court culture in which authors such as Murasaki could thrive, to decidedly personal and often acid observations of contemporary female poet-authors such as Izumi Shikibu and Sei Shōnagon and to contemplative passages regarding the author's concerns with the limitations of court life.

Murasaki Shikibu is, of course, best know as the author of what undoubtedly is this era's masterpiece, *The tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*, early eleventh century). She was busy writing parts of the tale while the events in her memoir took place and presumably its first audience was Murasaki's empress and her salon. The memoir gives a tantalizing glimpse of how this court lady construed authorship and the act of writing. She describes an incident in which Michinaga had a copy of *The tale of Genji* stolen from her apartments in the inner palace. Sections of the tale were then read to the emperor, bringing the tale out into the semi-public sphere of his quarters. Murasaki is horrified, but intriguingly not only because of the open attention outside the direct confines of Shōshi's salon drawn to her fictional writing. It appears that a draft copy was stolen and there is the strong hint that Murasaki resents the fact that the emperor was made to listen to the wrong version of her

tale. Yet her disappointment with the futility of life at court extends to her writing as well; at times her tale seems "overindulgent" when she takes it out to rework. However, Murasaki's descriptions of court life, brilliant even in its more intimate moments, did attract readers greatly. At least, that is suggested by the choice of passages illustrated some two centuries later in the *Illustrations of the memoirs of Murasaki Shikibu* (*Murasaki Shikibu nikki ekotoba*, thirteenth century), which leaves out the introspective segments of Murasaki's memoir.

Certainly one of Murasaki Shikibu's readers was drawn to the image of court life in her work. One reason that makes *The Sarashina memoirs* (*Sarashina nikki*, after 1059) so valuable is that it gives a very rare insight into how fictional literature was consumed in Heian Japan. The autobiography of a woman known as the daughter of Sugawara no Takasue (Sugawara no Takasue no Musume, 1008-?), *The Sarashina memoirs* starts with the author's intense and long-lasting fascination for tale literature, especially *The tale of Genji*. As a young girl in the provinces, where her father is stationed as governor, she laments that she has access only to certain chapters of Murasaki's tale. When at age thirteen she returns with her father to the capital, an aunt provides her with a complete set of *The tale of Genji* as well as other tales.

As the probable author of *Tale of the Hamamatsu middle counsellor* (*Hamamatsu chūnagon monogatari*, mid-eleventh century) and possibly other works of fiction no longer extant, the daughter of Sugawara no Takasue understandably presents readers with a self-definition as tale-absorbed, but eventually her theme shifts towards a Buddhist emphasis on the false and therefore misleading nature of fiction. Rather, the theme shifts from yearning for escapism through tales to yearning for salvation through the Buddha Amida, the latter retroactively colouring the former. We see a parallel here with the structure of *Gossamer years*, in which the retrospective tone (melancholic assessment of past deeds and imperfect attempts at salvation) is set off against emotions as lived in the moment (fiction and companionship as comfort).

It is difficult to assess who formed the intended audience for these memoirs by aristocratic women. The majority of readers will have consisted of other aristocratic women in the authors' vicinity, but as the illustrated version of Murasaki's memoir shows,

these texts could reach a wider audience. There is the possibility that, again like Murasaki's "diary", some authors also aim to pay tribute to their patrons, even if not the whole text works explicitly towards that agenda. Other examples of these 'glorifying texts' are Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow book* (see below) and the *Memoirs of Lady Sanuki* (*Sanuki no suke nikki*, 1107-1108), by Fujiwara no Nagako (aka Sanuki no Suke, 1097?-?), which describes the author's time in the service of Emperor Horikawa (1079-1107) whose assistant handmaid (*suke*) she was. This type knows later incarnations by male authors as well, such as *Memoirs of Minamoto no Ienaga* (*Minamoto no Ienaga nikki*, between 1216 and 1221), in which the author retroactively constructs an ideal narrative of his monarch's reign, especially of Go-Toba's (1180-1239) involvement in the compilation of the eighth imperial poetry anthology, *New collection of poems ancient and modern* (*Shinkokin wakashū*, early thirteenth century).

The commemorative function of memoirs also seems to play a role in a number of tenth-century texts that intriguingly blur possible genre divisions. One case in point is *The tale of the Tōnomine minor captain* (*Tōnomine no shōshō monogatari*, second half tenth century) also known by an older title as *The Takamitsu memoir* (*Takamitsu nikki*). It is based on a historical incident when Fujiwara no Takamitsu (940?-994?), a young man from the powerful Regents' House of the Fujiwara family, in 961 chose to become a monk rather than to pursue his promising political career. This work holds middle ground between tale, memoir and personal poetry collection, and centres on the grief of Takamitsu family members, especially his sister and his wife, at his decision. It should be remembered that, as noted above, titles were often given by later readers, not by the original authors and therefore are more indicative of their reception than their creation and that works could have alternative titles. *Memoirs of Izumi Shikibu*, for example, was also known as *The tale of Izumi Shikibu* (*Izumi Shikibu monogatari*) and the *Tales of Ise* also circulated under the title *Memoirs of the Ariwara middle captain of the fifth rank*.

These memoirs sketch a world of women who not only felt the need but also were given the room to express a sense of 'self', not in the modern meaning of the word and certainly not as near-modern individuals rather than representatives of a court culture to which they intensely felt they belonged, but as recognizable voices nonetheless. The

attraction of the memoirs to modern readers undoubtedly lies in their absorption with the authors' immediate world. The memoirs are highly introspective, concerned with how one reacts to events, rather than with the events themselves. Intriguing in this respect is the near absence of concrete historical markers in the memoirs; it is often unclear in what year events take place, there are few references to the political world of the court. In this way the memoirs sketch a timeless archetype of the Heian aristocratic woman as anxious about her position in the world, her position within relationships with men who are important in her life and, at least equally important, her position within relationships with other women in her social sphere.

Sino-Japanese autobiographical writings

Nevertheless, women did not have a monopoly on introspective autobiographical writing in this period. Sino-Japanese ego documents by men that consciously presented a more personalized voice exist as well. *Record of my pond pavilion* (*Chitei ki*, 982) is an essay by the literatus Yoshishige no Yasutane (?-1002) that extols the life of "seclusion within the city" (Ch. *shiyin*, Jp. *shi'in*), seeking to connect with similar continental writings by especially Bai Juyi, who invented the term "middle seclusion" (Ch. *zhongyin*, Jp. *chūin*) for those admirable recluses who find an inner sanctum within court and society without the dubious recourse of moving into the mountains. Echoes of earlier Sino-Japanese writings, such as the identically titled essay by Prince Kaneakira (914-987), among others author of *Poetic exposition on Tuqiu* (*Tokyū no fu*, 977), may be seen as well, but Yasutane's text also foreshadows the thirteenth-century classic *An account of my hermitage* (*Hōjō ki*, 1212) by Kamo no Chōmei (1155?-1216). *Record of my twilight years* (*Bonen ki*, late eleventh century) is more exceptional in that its author, the scholar-poet and bureaucrat-raconteur Ōe no Masafusa (1041-1111), in this miniature autobiography unabashedly presents himself as a child prodigy as he narrates his first achievements in the composition of Sino-Japanese poetry and prose.

[7.] A text unto its own: *The pillow book*

One of the most powerful and best-known masterpieces of Heian literature is at the same time probably its most enigmatic. There was never anything quite like it before it existed and one may say that it has never been matched since. An exhilarating mixture of lyrical personal memoir and astute observation of court life, *The pillow book* is a unique reinvention of the act of writing, pushing the boundaries of genre and abounding in the delights of the world it describes and engages with. Together with *The tale of Genji*, *The pillow book* (*Makura no sōshi*, 990s) is widely acknowledged as one of the most important classics, in all the meanings of the word, produced by the tenth-century court. It is also a work that has successfully defied attempts to categorise and consequently, to an extent, analyse it in any comprehensive way. For such a famous text, it has generated far less analysis than one would expect. The inability so far to fruitfully attempt a comprehensive reading of *The pillow book* is indicative of its author's elusive attitude towards the aims of her text. The woman who wrote it, Sei Shōnagon, was so quirky a character that her book seems to defy easy characterisation. Undoubtedly, this passage will fail also.

There is no single text of any Heian literary work; only variant texts exist. This is of course true of any premodern text and in fact, of many modern texts as well. However, it may be especially true of *The pillow book*. We have no certainty as to what Sei Shōnagon's text looked like when she had finished it, if she ever did. As the oldest extant manuscripts date from the Kamakura period, it is problematic to assess how Sei had organised the text herself. Two important lineages of her text exist. The first is randomly organised (the so-called Sankan or "three fascicles" and the Nōin versions). The other line consists of texts that are highly organised and rubricized and that tend to differentiate passages from each other (the so-called Maedake and Sakai versions); quite likely this generical grouping is a later editorial decision. *The pillow book* as we know it is split up into a series of circa three hundred numbered "sections" (*dan*), but this organisation, too, must be regarded as much later editorial intervention. To the extent that one can venture anything about an original state of the text, the *Ur Pillow book* was a text in which all these passages randomly flowed over into each other, without any tidy distinction between them. Yet what all text variants have in common is the existence of three types of passages: memoir-like reminiscences of

Sei's life in the service of her empress Teishi, essay-like general observations of the behaviour in court circles, and lists.

The lists in *The pillow book* may be the most idiosyncratic, original and perplexing element of Sei Shōnagon's text, especially when seen in relation to the other passages. Sei's lists, which take up roughly one-third of the book, are often just that: the mention of a category ("Plains"; "Things that look fresh and pure"), followed by a series of names or brief descriptions ("Mika Plain, Ashita Plain and Sono Plain"; "Earthenware cups. Shiny new metal bowls. Rushes to be used for making mats. The transparent light in water as you pour it into something."). The lists can be subdivided into a group that start with a noun (the "*wa*-type", after the thematic marker *wa* that follows the noun in question) and the "things that …" lists (the so-called "*mono*-type", *mono* meaning "thing"). This latter list group may naturally evolve into essay-type observations and such progressions are typically were later editors would mark a division into a different passage.

On the one hand delightfully suggestive of personal fascination, the lists (especially of the *wa*-type) in *The pillow book* may in fact also have served another purpose. Taken as a whole, the lists often seem derived from organisational principles of such poetry anthologies as *Six quires of poems ancient and modern* and possibly from Chinese examples. In this respect scholars often point to Tang period reference compendia widely known in Heian Japan such as *Classification of literary writings* (*Yiwen leiju*, ca. 620) and *Notes for first studies* (ch. *Chuxue ji*, Jp. *Shogaku ki*, 727). It is quite possible that, like the categorisation in *Six quires*, Sei envisaged sets of topics that could somehow function as starting points for poetry. While herself generally deemed a limited and rather unproductive and unexceptional *waka* poet, a view Sei herself seems to have endorsed, Sei's father Kiyowara no Motosuke (908-990) had been one of the compilers of *Later collection* and was a *man'yō* scholar as well as a poet; her great-grandfather Fuyukabu (active 908-930), a contemporary of Ki no Tsurayuki, became one of the "late classical thirty-six immortal poets". Sei's family then had an impressive poetic pedigree and was well versed in the classification and arrangement of poetry. Sei herself describes many instances of a ready wit that relies heavily on familiarity with the poetic canon, both in Japanese and Chinese. It seems possible then that her lists may be read as an essay in

poetic organisation. Seen in this light, even the famous opening passage ("In spring, the dawn—when the slowly paling mountain rim is tinged with red, and wisps of faintly crimson-purple cloud float in the sky. In summer, the night …") is part of an aesthetic that is very focused on the poetic.

Aesthetics of association as well as of conduct govern many of the essay-like passages. The essays are concerned with smell, sound, vision, and behaviour; they are engrossed in the exterior world of upper court life. Sei's family had operated at the fringes of this world and now that she found herself catapulted into the empress' close quarters she wrote a testimony to that domain of dazzle. Central in *The pillow book* is the service at court (*miyatsukae*), and more specifically the court of empress Teishi, as a truly meaningful existence. This code of belief underlies all of Sei's observations and reflections and in that sense the memoir passages and the essay-like passages do not constitute two very separate categories. And since several of the lists of the *wa*-type develop, certainly in the randomly organised manuscript lines, into observations, perhaps one thing that unifies *The pillow book* is how it continuously in various ways engages with life at court. Not surprisingly, *The pillow book* is often read as a testimony to the chic of Teishi's court. It is a carefully crafted one at that, because, for all its seeming disarray, Sei's vigorously upbeat scrutiny of her empress' world is remarkably silent about its darker moments. Several scholars have pointed out that her book makes no reference whatsoever to a series of political disasters that befell Teishi during most of the seven years that Sei was in her service (993-1000): the sudden death of her father the regent Michitaka (953-995); the exile of her two brothers in the following year; the subsequent loss of her status as first empress (*chūgū*), a position she was forced to yield to her younger cousin Shōshi; and, finally, Teishi's own death in the year 1000. The knowledge of these suppressed events and the anguish they must have caused Teishi and her women makes for a poignant subtext to *The pillow book* as record of and memento to the glory of a world that was in a prolonged eclipse and then irretrievably lost.

If *Tales of Ise* is seen as the enactment of the notion of *miyabi* or courtly refinement, then the underlying motif in *The pillow book* is *okashi*. Indicating anything that is intriguing, pleasing, appealing or pleasantly amusing and suggesting an element of

immediacy of focus on the moment, Sei's key term *okashi* has been translated successfully as "delightful". It is used about 450 times in the text, and is often contrasted with the notion of *aware* (being moved or touched, either by something funny but usually by a sense of ephemerality of the human experience, and often leading to a moment contemplation) that typifies *The tale of Genji*. This schematic juxtaposition is best seen as an attempt to formulate an easy poetics of *The pillow book*, and as a convenient characterisation of Murasaki Shikibu as a thoughtful, withdrawn observer of court life and Sei Shōnagon as the exuberant participant in that world.

Incidentally, and indicative of her book's resistance to easy categorisation, Sei's crisp essays on court society have retroactively earned *The pillow book* the reputation as first example of *zuihitsu*, rather than a memoir (*nikki*). The ill-defined genre of *zuihitsu* (litt. "following the brush") comprises texts that in free association record things seen, heard, felt and experienced. It is a lineage of texts that would have to wait for Yoshida Kenkō's (1283?-after 1352) *Essays in idleness* (*Tsurezuregusa*, 1331) for the next generation in that line, unless one would wish to also ground the genre in the "narrative account" (Jp *ki*).

A passage that sheds light on how *The pillow book* may have come into existence is its "epilogue" (*batsubun*), in which Sei explains how her empress received from her brother, the palace minister Korechika (974-1010), a bundle of paper, an expensive commodity in Heian Japan, which she in turn presented to Sei Shōnagon. Korechika remarked, "They are copying *Records of the Historian* over at His Majesty's court", whereupon Sei enigmatically comments, "This should be a 'pillow', then." This moment would have taken place somewhere in the years 994-996. The epilogue also provided the enigmatic title of *The pillow book* (*Makura no sōshi*), one that only became the book's definitive name in the sixteenth century. "*Sōshi*" is a bound book (codex), as opposed to a scroll (*kansubon*), but as to what "*makura*" signifies opinions differ. One interpretation is that the word indicates a book kept by one's side to jot down notes for poetry (or prose) compositions; "*makura*" indeed did function as shorthand for *utamakura* (lit. "pillow word"), a term that in the narrow sense meant a poetic toponym, places that had a strong resonance in *waka*, but more broadly could be used for subject matter (*kokoro*) and vocabulary (*kotoba*) that might be applied in *waka*. A form of punning so typical for Sei's

wit has also been suggested: *Records of the Historian* (Jp. *Shiki*) is homophonous with "to lay out (bedding)" (*shiki*); Sei may have intended an accompanying "pillow". Further on in the epilogue, Sei describes an incident at some point in the years 995-997, where a visiting courtier managed to literally pull her manuscript out of her hands and did not return it for some time. "That seems to have been the moment when this book first became known—or so it is written," *The pillow book* concludes. The problem with the epilogue is that it may be spurious, but it does suggest that if not Sei herself then at least readers saw *The pillow book* as a text that portrayed Teishi's court for posterity, just as *Records of the Historian* (Ch. *Shiji*, Jp. *Shiki*, ca. 100 BC) had done for early Chinese history.

On balance, one thing that catches the eye about *The Pillow book* is the way it appears as the epitome of Heian literary thinking: it addresses, directly or indirectly, notions of 'Japan' (*wa*) and 'China' (*kan*), poetry's formative role for prose, and the categorisation of knowledge combined with the introspective nature of Heian writing.

[8.] Sino-Japanese poetry at the turn of the millennium

Given the rise of *waka* and the birth of narratives and memoirs in Japanese, it is easy to assume a marginal role for Sino-Japanese literature of the middle Heian period. However, this would be a mistake. There can be no doubt that the court of Emperor Ichijō (968-1008, r. 984-986) was also a period of *kanbun* revival. While we now tend to think of *The tale of Genji* and *The pillow book* as classic masterworks of this age, contemporaries put great stock in such *kanbun* anthologies as *Collection of Japanese views* (*Nikkanshū*, ca. 930s) compiled by Ōe no Koretoki (888-963), *Japanese collection* (*Fusōshū*, ca. 995-998) by Ki no Tadana (957-999), Takashina no Moriyoshi's (?-1014) *Beautiful poems from our court* (*Honchō reisō*, ca. 1010), and *Literary essence of our court* (*Honchō monzui*, ca. 1058) compiled by Fujiwara no Akihira (989?-1066). Literati still produced the occasional personal collection as well, although several are now lost.

As mentioned, following Sugawara no Michizane's exile in 901, one sees the emergence of a new aristocratic ideal, that was antiprofessional, antimeritocratic, and, to some extent, anti-intellectual. However, as tenth century emperors no longer seemed to care for *kanshi* collections, the Regents' House of the Fujiwara gradually overtook the role

as its patrons and simultaneously coerced the literati into underwriting the new power relations. Fujiwara marriage politics and support of women's writing went hand in hand with more traditional use of *kanbun* production. From the tenth century onwards, *kanshi* anthologies were as a rule sponsored by the Regents' House.

The mid-Heian period did not merely witness a revival of *kanbun* writing after the dominance of *waka* throughout the tenth century. Instead it ushered a period in which Japanese literati began building a new *kanbun* tradition and with it a new canon of poetry in Chinese. This new canon focused on Japanese authors, not Chinese poets, with the eventual result that by the late Heian period (1086-1185) "*kanshi*" became an indigenized notion. This tendency is also evident in manuals for the composition of Sino-Japanese poetry and prose of the late Heian and very early Kamakura periods, such as *Basics of composition* (*Sakumon daitai*, eleventh century with later reworkings) and *Notes on throwing metal* (*Tekkinshō*, ca. 1206-1210). Practically all the examples given in these two manuals are by Japanese poets. One reason for the focus on Japanese examples was the widespread habit in Heian Japan of composing to verse topics (*kudai*; see below). This suggests that mid-Heian literati were engaged mostly in a dialogue with earlier Japanese literati, much less so with authors from the Asian mainland.

Couplets and verse-topics

Two poetic forms that are very typical for mid-Heian Sino-Japanese poetry are verse-topic poetry (*kudaishi*) and isolated couplets (*ku*). These two forms are very much related and may be best understood by considering couplets as entities on their own that might be a stage towards a completed poem. The Heian fondness for isolating "fine couplets" (Ch. *jiaju*, Jp. *kaku*) of Chinese poetry and parallel prose finds its culmination in *Japanese and Chinese poems to sing*. This anthology exemplifies a trend to focus on units rather than on the entire poem. *Fine couplets for a thousand years* (*Senzai kaku*, some time between 925 and 957) by Ōe no Koretoki (888-963) with its 1,083 couplets is an extreme example of that preference for isolated poetic units. However, late Heian readers liked such collections of "superior couplets" (*shūku*) as much as their ancestors did. The eleventh and twelfth centuries saw the compilation of such couplet repositories as the *Superior couplets from our*

court (*Honchō shūku*, ca. 1066) and *Superior couplets from our court, continued* (*Zoku honchō shūku*, mid-twelfth century; no longer extant).

Couplets were freed from their context and more or less came to have a life of their own; they were appreciated as independent units. This trend in Heian Japan may very well be related to the fragmentation of regulated verse into parallel couplets in China. From the eighth century onwards, Chinese poets already increasingly focused on couplet craft as a basic poetic technique, almost to the point were the poem seemed to be disintegrating into independent parts. As such, Tang poetry was tailor-made for dissection into Japanese collections. In fact, it appears that the Chinese themselves already compiled similar collections of "superior couplets". Some of such anthologies must have reached Japan by the ninth century, since the *Catalogue of books existing in Japan* (*Nihonkoku genzaisho mokuroku*, shortly after 891) refers to several Chinese collections of "superior couplets." The idea of a focus on individual couplets as a typically Japanese obsession is clearly better understood as conceptions of couplets that were shared across East Asia.

The focus on isolated couplets was wedded to a categorical organisation of *waka* compilation in yet another of Fujiwara no Kintō's innovative anthologies. In *Japanese and Chinese poems to sing* Kintō brought together over eighth hundred couplets by Japanese and Chinese *kanshi* poets and *waka*, rubricized in a manner reminiscent of *Six quires of poems ancient and modern*. Again, Bai Juyi is the best represented poet. Kintō's anthology is a curious, fascinating and often exquisite text. It has been treasured as a collection of poetry to be chanted, as a primer for Chinese studies, as a source book for calligraphy, and even as a dictionary. Quite what Kintō aimed for is, is difficult to say. On one level it is a successfully sustained juxtaposition of Chinese and Japanese verse, even if in practice it was soon read primarily for its couplets. From at least the Kamakura period onwards, it was believed that Kintō's originally conceived of his anthology to decorate a set of screens. It is therefore deeply connected with calligraphy and was admired as much for how its text looked on paper as for its contents, whereby its different sets of calligraphic styles were often performed on stunningly beautiful paper combinations.

At another level of performance, the title suggests that the poems were intended as a repertoire for chanting (*rōei*). The habit of singing lines of Chinese poetry was an old one;

the narrator of *Tosa Journal* writes how "[the men] raised their voices and chanted Chinese poems (*karauta*)." The term "*rōei*" referred specifically to the chanting of poetry in Chinese; *waka* were also "sung", but for that act a different verb was used. There is no doubt that couplets were chanted a lot; that much we can tell from medieval diaries, tales, and anecdote collections. In fact Heian Japan at times appears to be singing all the time. However, *rōei* chanting for all practical purposes had no need to fall back on Kintō's anthology and the vast majority of his selection never made it to the *rōei* repertoire. But if the poems in Kintō's collection were indeed meant to be sung, the irony of history is that rather than a textbook of songs, *Japanese and Chinese poems to sing* quickly became a primer for learning Chinese.

All in all, *Japanese and Chinese poems to sing* is a successful assemblage of 'Japan' and 'China' (*wa* and *kan*), of performance and visual aesthetics. It was followed by a number of very similar anthologies, not all of which are extant. The first and best known emulation is *New selection of poems to sing* (*Shinsen rōeishū*, ca. 1116-1122, alternatively 1122-1133), which was explicitly intended as a sequel to Kintō's collection. It was compiled by Fujiwara no Mototoshi (1056-1142), a noted scholar and poet in both Sino-Japanese and Japanese. His *New selection of poems to sing* was instigated by his patron, the regent Fujiwara no Tadamichi (1097-1164), who was extremely active in setting up anthology projects involving work of his protégés.

This extreme interest in couplets was related to the composition of Sino-Japanese poetry. The conceptualisation of a Sino-Japanese poem as an integration of couplets fused with the conception of poems as reworkings or variations of a line of Sino-Japanese verse. Throughout the tenth, and especially after the middle of the tenth century, and eleventh centuries the dominant form for Sino-Japanese poetry had become the *kudaishi* or "verse topic poem". These were eight-line "regulated poems" (Ch. *lüshi*, Jp. *risshi*) that were composed to set topics consisting of a five-character line of verse, the so-called "verse topic" (*kudai*). The "regulated poem" was a genre that was new in Tang China, but the "verse topic" variety, although not unknown in China, was typical for Heian Japan. Consequently, poetry handbooks used Sino-Japanese examples when they listed the detailed prescriptions for the handling of such topics and broke the eight-line poem into

four couplets, the first of which had to contain all the characters from the topic and its second couplet should express the meaning of the topic characters with different graphs, and so on. Verse topic poetry quickly established itself as the new mould in which Sino-Japanese poems at formal occasions were formed. Consequently, verse topics became a textual reference point that both referred back to categories of similar lines and elicited textual reactions and in this way structured poetic discourse that extended to the composition of *waka*, for *waka* poets, too, would compose poems to the tune of the new poetic unit of topic verse.

Chinese learning as a "way"

The building of a new Sino-Japanese canon went hand in hand with yet another development, namely that of Chinese studies as a "way" or *michi*. This in turn was accompanied by the emergence of a tradition of "family learning" (*kagaku*), in which different scholar families or houses attempted to gain monopoly over certain types of scholarship. Most important among these were the Ōe and Sugawara families and the Ceremonial House (Shikike) or Umakai and the Hino branches of the Fujiwara.

Michi has been recognized as a leading principle of Japanese medieval arts, centring on the dedicated pursuit of an art or technique and valuing anyone who committed to it. This theoretically egalitarian idea valued craft over breeding and was antithetical to the Heian code of *miyabi* (courtly refinement) for the arts and family connections for politics. Chinese studies was the only art for which a training trajectory and dedication to specialisation was accepted, but this very fact seems to have prevented scholars from rising very high in the echelons of power and the circles that have become emblematic of Heian court culture. Consequently, unlike *waka* poets, *kanshi* poets may at first sight seem to have started out as 'medieval' poets, in the sense that they experienced poetry as an art form that required tremendous dedication and not as a mere social expression. For *waka* poets, this notion of poetry as an art or a "way" took shape from around 1100 onwards. In that respect the literati's situation in the mid-Heian period did not significantly differ from that of *waka* poets from the twelfth century onwards: expertise had always been at the core of their existence, both artistically and socially as well as economically.

As most observations about poets in Japan are based on developments in the field of *waka*, it is worthwhile to ask how the world of *kanshi* and *waka* differed. For practitioners of Chinese poetry, formal training was acquired through an institution. Unlike *waka* poets, who learned their craft from their fathers or through private teachers but had no formal curriculum in a recognized institute, most *kanshi* poets received their education at either the court academy or related family-based colleges such as the Kangakuin. The Kangakuin was one of several family-run institutions that started out as combined dormitory and cram schools for students at the court academy, but gradually evolved into semi-independent colleges. Other private schools also existed.

Founded around 670, the court academy offered courses (or "ways") in Confucian classics (*myōkyō*), literature (*monjō*) and history (*kiden*), law (*myōhō*), arithmetic (*san*), calligraphy (*sho*), and pronunciation (*on*). At first these courses were taught with unvarying attention, despite an inequality of status within the curriculum. However, when the academy's literature program increased in popularity and prestige, differences between the programs in literature and history grew less distinct, and eventually the two were joined together. Knowledge of Chinese literature was a prerequisite for the composition of documents in Chinese, the language of state documents. Chinese poetry was an important aspect of court ritual, and the academy catered to that need by teaching composition.

Kanbun manuals and other primers, such as Minamoto no Tamenori's (?-1011) *Fun by mouth* (*Kuchizusami*, 970), facilitated the educational trajectory for Chinese learning. Typically, a boy of the Heian upper class would start learning to read and write characters at around age six. One important textbook for beginners was *Youth inquires* (Ch. *Mengqiu*, Jp. *Mōgyū*; early eighth century), a biographical dictionary of Chinese cultural history. From the eleventh century onwards, *Japanese and Chinese poems to sing* was added to the list of primers, thereby introducing couplets by Japanese *kanshi* poets into the curriculum. From this point on, students began reading basic texts from China, all from the four major categories of the Chinese writing canon: the classics (Ch. *jing*, Jp. *kyō*), the philosophers (*zi*, Jp. *shi*), the histories (Ch.+Jp. *shi*) and poets' collections (Ch. *ji*, Jp. *shū*). To facilitate studies,

Japanese scholars developed a plethora of compendia on the composition of texts in Chinese.

The post of "professor" (*hakase*) and head (*kami*) in the court academy tended to remain within a limited number of families specializing in Chinese studies, and many poets of Sino-Japanese verse were somehow related by blood or marriage. These literati had acquired a thorough formal training, including examinations, in the reading and composition of Chinese poetry. In fact, many remained affiliated with the court academy or family institutions, either as head, erudite or "acting assistant" (*tokugōshō*), which allowed them to receive a salary or stipend in recognition of their academic skills. In short, long before other arts developed into creative skills practiced principally by recognized experts from different schools, Chinese learning was from the beginning a possible career track. The unique position held by literati in a court society that needed at least another century before it would more broadly acknowledge artistic talent and training as a form of cultural capital.

Late Heian writings in Sino-Japanese

The richness of Sino-Japanese writing of the eleventh century blossomed into new abundances of literati texts in the twelfth century. *Kanshi* meetings, as well as matches comparable to *utaawase*, flourished and one sees a use of relatively underdeveloped prose genres such as poem prefaces (*shijo*), "narrative accounts" (Chi. *ji*, Jp. *ki*) in order to explore new subject matter. Also the twelfth century introduced a new phenomenon, that of "non-verse topic poetry" (*mudaishi*). As mentioned above, the dominant form for Sino-Japanese poetry had become the *kudaishi* or "verse topic poem". By the late eleventh century, this dominance of verse topics came to be seen as divergent from the perceived ideal of Tang poetry and early Heian *kanshi*. The breakaway from verse topic poetry, albeit not absolute, coincided with the poets' exploration of new material, immensely broadening their subject matter, and the development of an almost prosaic style, very reminiscent of Bai Juyi's poems. This new type of poetry was collected in *Collection of non-verse topic poems from our court* (*Honchō mudaishi*, 1162-1164?), an anthology of nearly 800 Sino-Japanese poems written in the century between 1050 and 1150. This anthology may be seen as indicative

of another development, namely that from the tenth century onwards, the Regents House became an active sponsor of literati. *Collection of non-verse topic poems from our court* focuses primarily on poets connected to the Ceremonial House (Shikike) or Umakai of the Fujiwara and must have been ordered by the energetic regent Fujiwara no Tadamichi, who dominated the twelfth-century *kanshi* scene. Similarly, the other major anthology of Sino-Japanese poetry of that century was also compiled by someone with ties to the Regents' House. The cumbersomely titled *Collection of Sino-Japanese poems on the back of the categorized "Journal of the minister of the right"* (*Chūyūki burui shihai kanshishū*, twelfth century) is in fact a nameless anthology; its title was given after its discovery in 1953: to write on the back of letters or diaries was a not unusual way of saving paper, which was an expensive commodity. Incidentally, "categorized" (*burui*) refers the habit of culling information from, for example, diaries and rearranging it thematically, quite like poetic handbooks such as *Six quires of poems ancient* or *Japanese and Chinese poems to sing* did with poetry. The anonymous anthology contains some 450 poems' many of which are verse topic poetry, as this remained the dominant poetic form for formal occasions. The growth of *mudaishi* shows how literati developed separate formats for informal and often unusual settings.

The subject of late Heian Sino-Japanese verse is diverse, but much of it reflects the expression of informal settings. Most important among these is the genre of "visits to mountain temple" (*yū sanji*), which that is singled out as a poetic category unto its own in the 1116 encyclopaedia *Collections of our court and people*. Quite a few travel poems remain, especially by the otherwise unknown wandering poet-monk Renzen (1082?-?); they open up court poetry to new sights outside the capital. As with temple visiting poetry, it is the poet's displacement from his usual habitat, the city, that provides an opportunity for contemplation of the self. His displacement is visualized through descriptions of nature. The rise of what may be termed recluse poetry, ranging from Bai Juyi's "middle seclusion" within the city to deserted mountain temples and fusing with contemplative nature descriptions, took great flight from the middle of the eleventh century onwards, with reverberating echoes in late Heian *waka*.

Mudaishi composed at informal gatherings and the flexible genre of the "narrative account" and poem preface provided the textual space for innovation. These important prose genres were anthologised in, among others, *Literary essence of our court, continued* (*Honchō zoku monzui*, between 1142 and 1155). These genres came close to forming a literary free zone that allowed tremendous thematic variety and freedom of vocabulary. Although not without models of their own, their themes could cover almost anything, from 'unlucky' subjects such as sickness to local folklore or itinerant entertainers. What are now considered to be interesting or innovative Sino-Japanese texts from the late Heian period were all composed on well-defined occasions only and through these given formats. It is her that one sees that next to the introspective tales (*monogatari*) such as *The Tale of Genji* there existed another literature of a more "documentary" type, exemplified by works in the narrative account genre and certain *mudaishi*, as well as anecdote (*setsuwa*) collections such as *Tales of times now past* (*Konjaku monogatarishū*, twelfth century).

In their reflections of a world beyond court society, these texts build towards what may be termed the literature of the social fringe. The most extreme case is perhaps *A new account of sarugaku* (*Shin sarugaku ki*, ca. 1052) by Fujiwara no Akihira (989?-1066), the founder of the Umakai Ceremonial Branch of Fujiwara scholars. It is a description of a fictitious family that comes to see a performance of *sarugaku* (litt. "monkey music"), a popular form of entertainment. The large number of the family's children, including sons-in-law, provides a glimpse into the variety of professions practiced by townspeople: gambler, warrior, farm overseer, shaman, scholar, wrestler, courtesan, painter, and so on. What is perhaps even more remarkable than Akihira's choice of subject matter is his balance between description and irony. His text seems to have been in part intended as a model book, displaying the stylistic possibilities of Chinese writing, but it is also an exhaustive experiment in charting a social sphere that was close in geography yet distant in the social order. Less exuberant but equally interesting are two accounts from the late-eleventh century by the prolific and multi-talented Ōe no Masafusa, *An account of courtesans* (Y*ūjo ki*) and *An account of kugutsu* (*Kairaishi ki*; *kugutsu* or "puppeteers" were itinerant entertainers). Taken together with a series of poems on the same subject in

Collection of non-verse topic poems from our court, they suggest a similar literati interest in the margins of society.

[9.] Tale literature (*monogatari*) [*not included; see preliminary remarks*]

[10.] Other prose writings

Once again: narrative fiction, while avidly read, stood low in the Heian ideological hierarchy of texts. More respectable than fiction were works of instruction, description and enumeration. It will be clear by now that great store was put in categorizing and summarizing knowledge that was deemed indispensable for functioning in court culture. To the extent that "literature" was a recognizable category in Heian thinking, the following categories of texts certainly would rank as such.

To varying degrees these texts present information and ideas as lists, as loosely structured stories or even as short and often unintelligible remarks. They hint at what one might call an 'anecdotal mode' of discourse that becomes stronger throughout the late Heian and Kamakura periods, one that is not restricted to the texts mentioned here. This mode is encountered in such textual rubrics as "conversations" or "sayings" (*dan*[*wa*]), "oral transmissions" (*kuden*), "treatises" (*zuinō*), "notes" (*shō*), "explanations" (*shaku*), "commentaries" (*chū*), "stories" (*go* var. *katari*), "ancient practices" (*koji*), and even "tales" (*monogatari*). These categories can be collapsed into one larger or 'meta' category of the anecdotal genre, given that they have in common the presentation of sets of ideas and bodies of knowledge that are not presented in the form of an explicitly reasoned argument. Instead, regardless of their script-language and content (or 'genre'), many share the characteristic that information is offered in strings of anecdotes that form a commentary to a body of cultural knowledge. This anecdotal lore shares a degree of 'pointlessness', by which I mean that often the message of the anecdote is not spelled out but must be inferred. This then is usually true of whole strings of anecdotes in a collection.

As such, this anecdotal mode may fall outside a discussion of 'literature' per se, but it is worthwhile to reflect on how it may help us to understand the function of several texts that do have a place in a history of literature, namely the ones discussed in this section. Importantly, these texts have in common a didactic function. When one accepts the likelihood that their anecdotal nature is tied to the rise of "family learning" (*kagaku*) that also occurred in the late Heian field of *waka*, they are probably best understood as part of, presumably spoken, interaction between instructor and audience. Within the context of this interaction the apparent 'pointlessness' of the anecdotal lore in so many of the collections mentioned here makes them more suitable as 'modular units' of didactic material, the specific meaning was to be explained outside the text. Rubricized compendia, then, did not wholly speak for themselves.

Poetic treatises

Already in the eighth century, one sees the formulation of rules concerning the composition of *waka*, but a discourse of *waka*'s functions, possibilities and aspirations did not take shape until *Collection of poems ancient and modern* was presented to the throne in ca. 914. The poems in the first royal collection came flanked by two prefaces, one in Japanese (the *kana* preface), attributed to Ki no Tsurayuki, and one in Sino-Japanese (the *mana* preface), attributed to Ki no Yoshimochi (?-919). Of these, the *kana* preface has always been the more influential, although both contain great similarities. Using Chinese critical poetic discourse to legitimize *waka* discourse, and thereby the enterprise of a royal *waka* anthology, the prefaces present the formulation of a critical awareness of poetic practice in the Japanese language, a confirmation of its natural centrality in the scheme of things (the *kana* preface famously opens with: "Japanese song takes the human heart as its seed and flourishes as a myriad word leaves. Many things happen to the people in this world and what they feel is given expression in [descriptions of] what they see and hear. When we hear the bush warbler amidst the blossoms and the voice of frog in the water, it is clear that every living being has its song."), and at the same time mould a tradition on which this awareness rests. Interestingly, as already mentioned, this historical approach did not seriously extend to anything prior to ca. 800.

In the *kana* preface, Tsurayuki formulates three critical concepts that would for centuries be the pivots of *waka* theorizing: *kotoba* ("words"), *kokoro* (litt "heart") and *sama* ("form" or "style"). The first notion is understandable enough and subsequent poetic treatises, of which there would be many, especially if one includes the lengthier judgements at poetry matches, tended to focus on either *kokoro* or *sama*, or the appropriate balance between the two. The "heart" of a poem had much to do with the poet's intention, his theme or concept. The idea of "form" (*sama*) on the other hand was used in Tsurayuki's preface in close analogy to the notion of "principle" or genre (Ch. *yi*; Jp. *gi*) in Chinese poetry and seems to have been more or less interchangeable with the notion of *sugata* ("form", "appearance," or "configuration") and was usually defined in terms a poem's outward appearance of effect. In that sense the term comes close to "style" rather than genre, although later treatises also use another term for "style": *tei* (or *tai*). Fujiwara no Kintō in his *New poetics* (*Shinsen zuinō*, ca. 1001?) vaguely refers to "the style (*sama*) of Tsurayuki and [Ōshikochi no] Mitsune" or tags the use of different words with the same meaning as "a style that must be avoided" (*saru sama*). But apart from two or three mid-Heian texts that rubricized poems into "styles" (usually ten of them, *jittei*), "style" seems until the twelfth century to have been a relatively undeveloped concept in discussions of poetry. In other words, although an old term, "style" (*tei*) was in many ways a critical concept that only late in the Heian period would provide an important addition to the old tripartite thinking in terms of "idea", "concept", or "theme" (*kokoro*), "wording" (*kotoba*), and "form" (*sugata*, *sama*). As such, "style" became the object of elaborate and even systematic attention in late Heian and medieval poetic treatises. The critical terminology of *waka* theory probably also knew a certain fluidity, and one should be careful in assuming that the same word always indicated the same unchanging concept.

Early and mid-Heian *waka* treatises are rather short and, consequently, one is tempted to say, often enigmatic. From ca. 1100 this changes and this change is solidly marked by *Toshiyori's poetics* (*Toshiyori zuinō*, ca. 1111-1115?), which in size was unlike anything *waka* theorising had ever seen. Compiled by Minamoto no Toshiyori, possibly for the instruction of Fujiwara no Taishi (var. Yasuko, 1095-1155), 1095-1155), a young regent's daughter who was to became an empress, this exhaustive treatise covers a wide

range of poetic forms and so-called "illnesses" (*uta no yamai*), continues with a crash course in *waka* history and a discussion of poetic techniques (such as *daiei*, or "composing to given topics") and styles, and introduces technical vocabulary. It is perhaps best known for its exhortation to find "new, interesting styles" (*mezurashiki sama*) and the mass of anecdotes (*setsuwa*), several of them Chinese legends, at the end of the treatise that might be used as inspiration for new poetry. Toshiyori does indeed have the reputation of an important innovator of *waka*, who liked experimenting yet had a pragmatic view of poetry composition as a craft. His treatise became an influential work for later generations and was often quoted in their discussions of poetry, no doubt because it was the first really comprehensive (and rather down-to-earth) treatment of *waka*.

Another pattern emerges here, namely that increasingly major treatises were written for presentation to powerful figures. Toshiyori wrote his treatise for a future empress. The next major tract was dedicated to emperor Nijō and written by a poet from the Rokujō House, Fujiwara no Kiyosuke. His *Folio book* is an eclectic survey of poetic exposition, largely written in Sino-Japanese, combining the minute ritual compendium for poetry sessions with a great store of poetic lore, making ample room for anecdotes about historical poets a swell as reflections on for example *Man'yōshū*. Part of it was not retrieved until 1987. Similarly, *Notes on poetic styles through the ages* (*Korai fūteishō*, 1197) by Fujiwara no Shunzei (1114-1204) was composed for the instruction of princess Shokishi (var. Shikushi, ?-1201). Shunzei's treatise was innovative in that it tied *waka* discourse to Tendai Buddhist doctrine. It traces the history of poetry in Japanese and deals with the characteristic elements of seasonal poetry. In his introduction, Shunzei likens the composition of *waka* to the practice of Buddhism and alludes to an old problem that seems to have taken on new urgency in late Heian Japan: the notion that poems were "wild words and fancy phrases" (*kyōgen kigyo*, var. *kyōgen kigo*) and were detrimental to the search for enlightenment. Shunzei's near-equation of poetic and religious practice salvaged *waka* from its supposed ephemerality and re-emphasized the seriousness of the pursuit of *waka*.

Encyclopaedias and the categorisation of knowledge

It has become clear by now that Heian Japan was intent on categorizing knowledge and spurred a substantial number of repositories of accessible information. Examples have been given of the categorisation (*burui*) of information in Sino-Japanese journals, of categorizing poems (both in Japanese and Sino-Japanese), and of circumstances for poetry composition. For literati, such rubrications were only the manifestation of a more generic principle, namely that all useful knowledge could find its place in encyclopedic compendia. The difference between a poetic anthology and a dictionary was no so great. A famous poet of both *waka* and *kanshi* like Minamoto no Shitagō could compile a massive dictionary, *Categorized notes on Japanese words* (*Wamyō ruijūshō*, ca. 934), and besides *Collections of our court and people* of 1116 the court scholar Miyoshi no Tameyasu also wrote a *Compendium of learning at hand* (*Shōchūreki*, 1120s). The Sino-Japanese poet Fujiwara no Akihira also produced one of several existing model books for letter writing in Sino-Japanese, *Akihira's models of correspondence* (*Meikō ōrai*, aka *Unshū shōsoku* or *Letters from Izumo province*, ca. 1060s). Fujiwara no Kintō who had assisted retired emperor Kazan in the editing of the royal *waka* anthology *Collection of gleanings* worked steadily on his *Notes from the northern mountains* (*Hokuzanshō*, eleventh century) that exhaustively treat the ceremonial calendar of court life.

Anecdotal knowledge

In creating and shaping a way of Chinese learning in the Heian period, comments on texts and poets became the basis from which a new canon of *kanbun* was built, which is typical of the pattern of Chinese scholarship transmitted throughout the Heian period. In this sense, the anecdotal quality of many remarks in the *The Ōe conversations* (*Gōdanshō*, early twelfth century) or prefaces to both *kanshi* and *waka* should probably be regarded as an essential element in transmitting an established attitude towards texts and literature. These anecdotal remarks, similar to Chinese "poetry talks" (Ch. *shihua*, Jp. *shiwa*), constitute one form of commentary and were intended to be instructive as well as entertaining. This is similar to the sphere of *waka*, where one sees the emergence of the anecdotal remarks as a

common feature of poetic treatises only after poets began to formulate their art as a "way" and started to withdraw into schools.

The Ōe conversations is a collection of nearly 450 lively anecdotes, snippets of information, and commentary to lines of Chinese verse, recounted by the scholar-poet and raconteur Ōe no Masafusa and written down and rubricized by Fujiwara no Sanekane (1085-1112). This format was followed in *Stories from inside and outside the capital* (*Chūgaishō*, mid-twelfth century) and *Stories of Lord Fuke* (*Fukego*, twelfth century), both told by the regent Fujiwara no Tadazane (1078-1162) and recorded respectively by Nakahara no Moromoto (1109-1175) and Takashina no Nakayuki (1121-1179). In a sense, poetic treatises such as *The folio book* or *Nameless notes* (*Mumyōshō*, between 1211 and 1216) by Kamo no Chōmei (1155?-1216) or anecdotal historical surveys such as *Talks about things of the past* (*Kojidan*, between 1212 and 1215) echo the format of recording anecdotal information that, within a larger textual structure, attains instructive value.

Religious lessons

A didactic purpose is also what motivated a variety of religious tracts. Many of these took an anecdotal form. Like the early ninth-century *Account of supernatural and strange stories in Japan* from it cites considerably, *Illustrations of the three jewels* (*Sanbōe*, 984) for example is a collection of short Buddhist tales (*setsuwa*). It was written by Minamoto no Tamenori for the edification of princess Sonshi (966?-985), a daughter of emperor Reizei (950-1011) who had recently taken vows as a nun. It was originally illustrated but only the text survives. The three jewels from the title that also provide the book's structure in three parts are the Buddha (Jp. *butsu*), the teachings (Sk. *dharma*, Jp. *hō*) and the clergy (Sk. *samgha*, Jp. *sō*), the formulaic synonym for Buddhism as a whole.

With the emergence of the so-called *mappō* thought in the late tenth century Japanese court society became increasingly concerned with new religious practices. *Mappō*, or "the end of the dharma", designated the stage in which understanding of the teachings of the historical Buddha had deteriorated to a point where people could no longer reach salvation by themselves. In Japan, this last phase of decline of the dharma was supposed to begin in 1052. Increasingly people turned towards salvation "through the

strength of someone else" (*tariki*), which took the form of "reciting the Buddha's name" (*nenbutsu*) and which was seen as a means for rebirth (*ōjō*) in the western paradise of the Buddha Amida, the "pure land". This thesis was explained in the monk Genshin's (942-1017) influential treatise *Essentials of rebirth in paradise* (*Ōjōyōshū*, 985) and led to a flourishing genre of biographies of historical people who had attained such a rebirth. The first of these was *Account of Japanese reborn in paradise* (*Nihon ōjō gokurakuki*, ca. 989) by Yoshishige no Yasutane, who already in 964 had founded a "society for the encouragement of learning" (*kangakue*) where students from the court academy regularly met with monks for meditation and religious discussion sessions as well as the composition of Sino-Japanese verse.

A variant biographical collection, *Lives of Japanese immortals* (*Honchō shinsenden*, late eleventh century) by Ōe no Masafusa, diverges more into an intermediate zone between Buddhist and Daoist practice as it portrays a number of ascetics, monks, miracle workers. All are considered *shinsen*, a term associated with Daoist practices that is usually translated as "immortals", people who through ascetic practices attain mystical powers. These biographical lessons and other tales of instruction have in common that they were recorded by literati outside monastic circles, showing that subject matter inspired by religious practice was well within the scope of those trained in the court academy.

Unofficial histories

After 901 the court stopped compiling official, Sino-Japanese annalistic histories. *Veritable record of three reigns of Japan* marked the last of what eventually became known as "the six national histories" (*rikkokushi*). Although privately compiled sequels exists, *Annals of our court* (*Honchō seiki*, between 1153 and 1159, begun at the instigation of the retired emperor Toba [1103-1156, r. 1107-1123]) by Fujiwara no Michinori (aka Shinzei, 1106-1159) and *Abbreviated record of Japan* (*Fusō ryakki*, twelfth century, covering Japan's history up to the early twelfth century), the late Heian period would see a new genre, that of the unofficial history with a narrative scope, written in Japanese, that go under the modern rubric "historical tale" (*rekishi monogatari*).

As the first, early example *A tale of flowering fortunes* (*Eiga monogatari*, ca. 1030, final part after 1092) is often mentioned, attributed to the poet Akazome Emon; it describes the pinnacle of the Regent's House's glories under Michinaga's rule. But next to this there is the series of four "mirrors", beginning with *The great mirror* (*Ōkagami*, twelfth century, covering the period 850-1025). Like its sequels *The new mirror* (*Imakagami*, ca. 1170, covering the period 1125-1170), *The water mirror* (*Mizukagami*, late twelfth century, covering the period from the legendary Jinmu *tennō* up to 850) and *The clear mirror* (aka *The larger mirror*, *Masukagami*, late fourteenth century, covering the period 1180-1333), *The great mirror* is presented as a reminiscence of incredibly old and fictitious narrators. This work, too, celebrates the life and times of Michinaga, albeit very different in style from *A tale of flowering fortunes*, as it does not shun from presenting its protagonists in unflattering ways; Sei Shōnagon's patron regent Michitaka, for example, is repeatedly depicted as drunk. *The new mirror* is less exclusively concentrated on the Regent's House, deals extensively with the poetic field of late Heian Japan, and is structured in biographies of royal family members and important courtiers that are rather reminiscent of the "exemplary biographies" (Ch. *liezhuan*, Jp. *retsuden*) in Chinese dynastic histories. *The water mirror*, on the other hand, was conceived as prequel, if you like, to the two previous 'mirrors', but in its description a partly mythical and miraculous past is more a work of the literary fantastic.

[11.] The medievalisation of late Heian *waka* poetry

If one is to pinpoint a beginning of the middle ages in Japanese *waka* history, a good moment would be the nineteenth day of the eighth month of 1094, or rather its immediate aftermath. That day a lavish poetry match was organised by regent Fujiwara no Morozane (1042-1101) at his home, which became known as *Poetry match in seven rounds at the Kaya palace* (*Kaya no in dono shichiban utawase*). The prescribed topics followed an accepted format of four seasons and a fifth item (usually "love" or "celebration"): cherry blossoms (spring), cuckoo (*hototogisu*; summer), moon (autumn), snow (winter), and celebration. The judge was Minamoto no Tsunenobu (1016-1097), a famed *kanshi* and *waka* poet and a high-ranking courtier. Not long after the match, the poetess Chikuzen (active 1041-1106)

sent in a complaint letter (*chinjō*) in which she took Tsunenobu to task for faulting one of her poems. This is the first instance on record in which a contestant challenged the judgment of the arbiter in a formal way, asserting a poet's right to dispute the expertise of figures of formal authority in poetry gatherings.

The process by which poets came to be so assertive about their craft forms part of what is called a "medievalisation process" that is characterized by two more or less simultaneous developments in the history of *waka*. The first was an intensification of public arguments over styles of composition and different approaches to poetry. The second, linked to the first development, was a tendency among poets to group themselves in factions or schools (*ie*) that became increasingly exclusive. Poetry moved from social expression to an art form that was increasingly appreciated at its own merits. This medievalisation process took place throughout the late eleventh and twelfth centuries. By the early thirteenth century day, poetry had largely become the pursuit of lesser court nobles willing to act as keepers of a body of specialized knowledge and had established itself as a possible career track.

The new ideal pursued by these lesser courtiers was *michi*, the "way" practiced by the artist. Scholars have come to regard this as the leading principle of the medieval arts. Originally denoting a specialized skill, the term *michi* came to embrace any kind of expertise, ranging from the practical artisan's techniques to the composition of poetry. Poets themselves came to speak of "the way of poetry" (*uta no michi*) as the steering course of their artistic lives, and this notion underlay the development of the specialist or expert poet. The observation that poetry moves from social expression to art is tied to the emergence of this concept of *michi*. Until the late eleventh century, poets had been courtiers for whom poetry was merely one of an array of social assets. The artisan "composers of poems" (*utayomi*) of the late ninth and early tenth centuries had metamorphosed themselves into "poets" of prominence.

Now definitely a matter for experts, the composition of poetry was held to require a polished dexterity acquired through long practice. *Waka*'s technical history is one of growing sophistication in handling a steadily decreasing choice of subject matter. Given this background it is not surprising that poets became increasingly tradition conscious and

that *waka* tended more and more to resemble other *waka*. As with any poetic mode shaped by a strong sense of formal conventions, *waka* had always had a "script" of sorts, and poets had worked with templates of given repertoire and themes, molding older versions into new variations. The new stage that late Heian poets helped set, however, was a neoclassical one in which the past became a conscious souvenir rather than a near-tangible object. Early- and mid-Heian poets were less encumbered by the weight of historical perspective and its corollary, the acknowledgment of distance.

The factionalisation as well as the grown emphasis on a poet's expert handling of the whole *waka* repertoire, found expression in the intensification of poetic practice. The handling of form and subject-matter required by now a knowledge of poetic matters so comprehensive, that either one had to train oneself thoroughly or not compete on a serious level. Poets started to compose poems in numbers that Heian Japan had not seen before. This was a time of increased production of private anthologies and personal collections and of ever-frequent poetry matches and the new phenomenon of hundred poem sequences (*hyakushu*), in which poets would compose a hundred *waka* each.

"Houses" and salons

The late eleventh and early twelfth centuries also mark the beginning of poetic houses that came to dominate the medieval field of *waka*. Poets belonging to or associated with these houses became important factions that not only provided tutorship to fledgling poets but also tried to shape the dominant taste in poetry. An important early house was formed by the Rokujō line of the Fujiwara, founded by the poet Akisue (1055-1123), who in 1118 introduced the novelty of organising "offerings for Hitomaro" (*Hitomaro eigu*) at which poems were composed in honour of this *Man'yōshū* poet, installed as the "sage" (*hijiri*) of *waka* in the preface to *Collection of poems ancient and modern*, after a ceremony in front of his portrait. This ritual, with its religious overtones, was continued by Akisue's descendants and seems to have been an important tool in establishing the Rokujō lineage as a prestigious house of *waka*. A second major poetic lineage that was to greatly determine medieval *waka* discourse was the Mikohidari house (also Fujiwara) that such poets as Fujiwara no Shunzei, who began as a disciple of Fujiwara no Mototoshi, and his son Teika.

One might also see in the grandfather-through-grandson line of Minamoto no Tsunenobu, his son Toshiyori and grandson Shun'e (1113-1191) an abortive formation such a poetic house of the Uda Genji.

These poetic houses sought alliances with political powerbrokers, such as regents, retired monarchs or imperial princes with entertained poetic circles that might be termed salons. Most collections and poetic treatises were triggered by or explicitly compiled for such patrons. One example is regent Fujiwara no Tadamichi, who sponsored fifteen *waka* matches at his home, of which four in the tenth month of 1118, when he was still twenty-two, and who was also an important patron of *kanshi* poets. Another is the Ninna-ji circle, hosted by monk-prince (*hosshinnō*) Shukaku (1150-1202) who resided in Ninna temple and at whose instigation a number of important contemporary "house collections" and poetic commentaries were put together. The Rokujō poet Kenshō, who served in the Ninna-ji, created for Shukaku's use a series of commentaries to the royal collections, as well as Toshiyori's house collection.

A remarkable salon was the Karin'en ("the poetry grove"), hosted by Shun'e. It was exceptional in that it was still very inclusive and bridged the factionalisation that was emerging, and that it was hosted not by a politically influential powerbroker but by a poet-monk of poetic standing but modest social status. Similarly, a group of poets would gather monthly at the Kamo Wake-ikazuchi shrine in Kyoto, where its head-priest Kamo no Shigeyasu (1119-1191) was an important organiser of poetry events that attended by many poets who also frequented the Karin'en. One result was *Monthly visit collection* (*Tsukimōde wakashū*, 1183) containing a good thousand poems by 288 poets divided into twelve books, one for each month. Another token of this slowly vanishing inclusiveness can be found in the contemporary *Collection of word leaves* (*Gen'yō wakashū*, 1180s), a private anthology long presumed lost until an incomplete copy surfaced in the Reizei family (a subsidiary branch of the Mikohidari) library in 1987. Its compiler, Koremune no Hirotoki (var. Hirokoto, 1134?-1208?), was an active in the Karin'en and the Kamo Shrine poetry circles and his collection reflects this end of an era that unsuccessfully tried to balance dedication to the art and social grace.

Royal anthologies as poetic arena

It took two centuries to compile the first three royal anthologies and they were followed by eight decades of inactivity on that front. Then, as if to compensate for this, four more royal anthologies followed each other in quick succession during the last century of the Heian period: *Later collection of gleanings* (*Goshūi wakashū*, 1086-1087), *Collection of golden leaves* (*Kin'yō wakashū*, 1124-1127), *Collection of word flowers* (*Shika wakashū*, ordered 1144, completed ca. 1151-1154), and *Collection for a thousand years* (*Senzai wakashū*, ordered 1183, completed 1188). They have in common among others, that they were all compiled by a single editor and that they paved the way for the conception of royal anthologies as representative of expressed poetic taste. This last point needs to be understood within the confines of the expectations and ritual conventions of a royal anthology; but the fact is that increasingly royal anthologies became the object of criticism and therefore had become part of the 'medieval' poetic discourse. Single editorship of a royal anthology in a way secured a form of ownership of formal poetic discourse. Not to have secured such commission could become grounds for denouncing a collection.

This was made clear in what is probably the most direct and vehement attack on a royal anthology, which is all the more interesting as it was staged immediately after its target was set up. *Faulting Later collection of gleanings* (*Nangoshūi*, ca. 1087?) is a critique by Tsunenobu of the fourth royal anthology that singles out eighty-four poems as unsuitable for the formal (*hare*) setting that the collection represented. Tsunenobu had probably expected to be chosen as the compiler by emperor Shirakawa (1053-1129, r. 1072-1086), but instead that role fell to the largely unremarkable Fujiwara no Michitoshi (1047-1099), probably because of his politically inoffensive position. As noted above, critique of royal anthologies would thereafter take the form of "anti-collections" that presented and alternative selection, rather than directly criticizing poems submitted to the throne.

Tsunenobu's son Toshiyori was given the possibility to redeem this situation when in 1124 by the retired monarch Shirakawa commissioned him to compile the fifth royal anthology, *Collection of golden leaves*. The problematic compilation process of this particular anthology, of which two rejected versions exist, illustrates how sensitive such

projects were becoming. The first version was too historically oriented with many early Heian poets and therefore apparently unsatisfactory in the monarch's eye, while the second swerved to the other extreme and privileged contemporary poets. Although this second version became the "circulating version" (*rufubon*), Shirakawa finally in 1127 accepted an anthology that kept middle ground. Perhaps he felt that Toshiyori had followed his suggestion too well, and that now the anthology ran the risk of being too avant-garde; *Collection of golden leaves* did indeed meet with criticism from several sides. Even the compiler's son remarked later that it contained "many flippant poems that try too hard to be interesting" and a poet from the Rokujō house compiled an anti-collection. It was that same Rokujō house that secured editorship of the sixth royal anthology. *Collection of word flowers* was finished by Fujiwara no Akisuke in ca. 1154 after a prolonged compilation process. This anthology, too, suffered an anti-collection, although this may in part be ascribed to the exile of commissioning monarch Sutoku (1119-1164) after his involvement in the Hōgen insurrection of 1156, in which he unsuccessfully allied himself with a bloody palace coup engineered by the usurping regent Fujiwara no Yorinaga (1120-1156).

That a new political order had arrived and that it would implicate royal anthologies became clear with work on *Collection for a thousand years*, an anthology that was compiled amidst the heavy fighting between Taira and Minamoto factions that would bring the Heian period to a close. Censorship became explicitly political: for the first time, compiler Fujiwara no Shunzei was forced to suppress the names of a number of contributing Taira poets, who had been branded enemies of the court. One famous example is the courtly warrior Taira no Tadanori (1144-1184), who slipped back in to the capital now full of Minamoto troops to deliver his poems to Shunzei, requesting he consider inclusion in the new royal anthology. Shunzei presumably worked from an earlier private anthology that he had been working. In the 1187 preface Shunzei house conjures up a vision of a royal reign full of peace and prosperity that reads as an exorcism of the traumatic age in which courtiers found themselves. In fact, this was probably exactly as it was intended. Commissioned in 1183 by retired monarch Go-Shirakawa (1127-1192, r. 1155-1158) who, it seems, had little interest in court *waka* but who was very committed to politics, was engaged in a series of ritualised acts on order to restore order and of which the finalisation

of *Collection for a thousand years* became part. There are indications the Shunzei modelled his anthology after *Collection of poems ancient and modern* of 905. After two royal anthologies that consisted of a mere ten books each, he reverted to the original format of twenty books and quite closely followed the structure of the first royal anthology; his main deviation was to devote a book to category "poems on the teachings of the Buddha" (*shakkyōka*), for which there was a precedent in *Later collection of gleanings*. Similarly, his preface in many ways echoes that by Tsurayuki. The last Heian royal anthology, then, seemed intent on closing a circle begun with the first such collection.

Another Heian voice: modern-style song

Heian literature appeals largely through the brilliance of its court culture, but this brilliance outshines a world beyond the court. Partly because the paucity of texts that speak directly with voices outside court circles, it is difficult to grasp what other literary traditions existed in Heian Japan, although it is clear that song (*kayō*) was everywhere. However, a glimpse of such variant literatures can be had through the rediscovery in 1911 of a collection of songs long though lost. These songs all belong to a popular genre known as "modern-style" songs (*imayō*), which flourished throughout the eleventh to thirteenth centuries and encompasses a wide range of songs performed by shrine maidens (*miko*), courtesans (*asobi* or *asobime*), itinerant female entertainers known as "puppeteers" (*kugutsu*), and, slightly later, so-called "white beat" singers (*shirabyōshi*). The incomplete *Secret selections of [songs to make] the dust on the rafters [dance]* (*Ryōjin hishō*, 1179) is part of what must have been a truly substantial collection of these women's repertoire and is accompanied by "collected oral transmissions" (*kudenshū*), all compiled by Go-Shirakawa.

It is a sobering realisation that a monarch would not only be interested enough to collect songs performed by women on the margins of society but even turns out to be a disciple of one these performers, initiated in their art and committing all he knew of it to paper for posterity. Go-Shirakawa was in fact criticized considerably for what many viewed as an unseemly involvement in an art that quite a few courtiers appreciated in their personal lives but that was supposed to be miles removed from formal court culture. Nevertheless, Go-Shirakawa was not alone in his royal patronage: *imayō* were performed at

court banquets and Go-Shirakawa's mother, empress Taikenmon'in Shōshi (var. Tamako, 1101-1145), also seems to have been a patron of *imayō* singing. While he earned a reputation, among his political opponents of a difficult and dull-witted man ("the biggest goblin [*tengū*] in Japan", the warrior ruler Minamoto no Yoritomo, 1147-1199, reportedly called him), Go-Shirakawa emerges from the *Collected oral transmissions* as someone with genuine wistful memories of his *asobi* teacher and a passionate dedication to *imayō* who is intent on elevating the status of *imayō* to that of respectable *waka*. It is no coincidence that he invokes *Toshiyori's poetics* as a model. The text also makes clear that a good number of lower ranking courtiers were involved in the monarch's pursuit of popular song, some of who had formidable reputations as *waka* poets.

Scholars writing on the subject of female performers tend to fall into two groups: those who argue that the women were marginalized and exploited, and those who maintain that they were fully integrated into society. Since the background of these female performers varied in the extreme, from courtiers' daughters to anonymous prostitutes, it is difficult to arrive at conclusive statements about their position in late Heian and early Kamakura society. Their situation varied tremendously depending on time and place. However, it is true that court society could allow for a domain where artistic expertise outweighed social status. There were momentary spaces in the palaces and villas where the performers' repertoire and skill gained them symbolic capital.

Imayō were "modern" (*imamekashi*) in contrast to the much older forms of *kami uta* ("deity song") and *saibara* ("horse-readying music). The term appears already at the end of the tenth century in *The pillow book*, when Sei Shōnagon notes: "*Imayō* are long and have unusual melodies." The term at once denotes a wide rubric of popular song, which could even include regular *waka*, and a specific type of popular song. In the narrow sense, *imayō* is a limited set of prosodic possibilities, often in the form of a quatrain, that follows an alternation of eight (or seven) and four (or five) syllables. *Imayō* were sung to the accompaniment of an instrument, usually a hand-drum, but occasionally also a lute (*biwa*), small flute (*hichiriki*), or mouth organ (*shō*).

So Heian song drifted towards the middle ages, as dedication to one's craft increasingly determined one's identity and the accumulated echoes of *waka*, of Sino-Japanese couplets and of narrative forms would reverberate the ages to come, down to the present day.